This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

955
K55

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE TUTOR'S STORY

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE TUTOR'S STORY

AN UNPUBLISHED NOVEL

BY THE LATE

CHARLES KINGSLEY

REVISED AND COMPLETED BY HIS DAUGHTER

LUCAS MALET

(MRS. MARY ST. LEGER HARRISON)

NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1916

Digitized by Google

COPYRIGHT, 1916, BY
SMITH, ELDER, & CO.

Digitized by Google

PREFATORY NOTE

THE history of this book is sufficiently peculiar to merit a few words of introduction.

The literary notebooks and manuscripts—published and unpublished—of my father, Charles Kingsley, were left to me by my mother. Nominally they came into my possession at the date of her death, in 1892. But circumstances, into which it is unnecessary for me to enter here, prevented my making a thorough examination of them until last winter.

I knew my father had planned, and begun writing, two novels—one called "The Pilgrimage of Grace," dealing with the suppression of the monasteries under Henry the Eighth; the other called "Darling, the History of a Wise Woman," the scene of which was laid in the New Forest and the plot of which concerned the doings of certain French refugees in the years immediately following The Terror. Portions of both these I found amongst a mass of lectures, essays, poems, sketches of character, etc.

But I also found about a hundred and fifty foolscap pages of another novel, entitled "The Tutor's Story," which was entirely new to me. I never remember hearing my father speak of it, nor do I find any allusion to it in "The Letters of Charles Kingsley and Memories of his Life." The fact that the

355503

Digitized by Google

Yorkshire scenery, along with various names of persons and places, is common to "The Tutor's Story" and the opening chapters of "The Water Babies" leads me to suppose it was written before and, probably, put aside in favour of the latter book, which appeared in 1863. More than this I neither know nor can, at this distance of time, conjecture. The discovery came as an absolute and delightful surprise to me, and to my sister when I showed her the manuscript.

The whole is in my father's hand, evidently written with a flowing pen, at odd moments as the fancy took him. Here and there a word or phrase is scratched out and another substituted; but the bulk of the copy is in the rough, neither revised nor polished. The first fifty or sixty pages are fairly consecutive. Then follow chapters and skeletons of chapters far on in the story, stray pages—notes—as "here he comes home drunk" and suchlike suggestions of intimate drama. But, notwithstanding discrepancies and obvious omissions, the characters are there, distinct and even vivid, living, talking, and not unfrequently behaving very badly. The scenery, in part at least, is there. The plot is there, too, firmly based though unresolved; events and situations being recorded the how and wherefore of which are neither led up to nor accounted for.

The manuscript, in short, offers a puzzle of which a good many pieces either are lost or have never existed—since it was my father's habit to put down a scene, description, or dialogue just as it occurred to

Digitized by Google

him, leaving all linking up and filling in to a final rewriting of his book.

How far I have succeeded in supplying these missing pieces it is for others to judge. I have developed the characters, disentangled the plot, and completed the story to the best of my understanding and ability, and have doubled the length of the original manuscript in the process. I have tried to preserve peculiarities of style, and maintain a moral and emotional unity throughout—to maintain, further, a certain freshness and simplicity of outlook which has the rather pathetic charm of a "day that is dead." I, personally, hold no brief for that day either in its literary, social, or political methods. Yet I find the charm a very real one; and I cannot but hope the readers of "The Tutor's Story"—thus sent forth in book form after lying hid for the better part of half a century—may endorse my opinion and find that charm a real one also.

LUCAS MALET.

OCTOBER 12, 1915.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE TUTOR'S STORY

CHAPTER I

I HAVE often thought of writing the story of my life, at least of its most interesting and critical portion. It is not enough, it seems to me, to dream over this incident or that, just as association may call them up. I ought to lay the whole methodically before me as a mirror of my past self; as a chart of the road along which Heaven has led me.—Come, I will begin it now. It will be a useful and not ungrateful occupation for these long hot summer mornings, while all the rest of the parish is busy in the fields.

Not ungrateful, truly. For, though I can look back upon mistakes, I have no disgrace, not even any serious failure, with which to reproach myself; and if I have had a hard battle to fight, I have conquered, I trust, not without honour. If much has been denied me, much has been given; and I can say with David "my lot is fallen in pleasant places," though I cannot say, perhaps, that "my cup runs over." But why should my cup run over? Why should I, like too many, have more pleasure than I can thoroughly and conscientiously enjoy and, intoxicated with variety and excitement, let my own happiness run to waste? Better is it to have my cup, as now, half

Digitized by Google

full, and to sip it delicately, deliberately, luxuriously, making the most of every drop.

Half full did I say? Surely that was a thankless speech. How much I have already. How much I have had for many peaceful years. Why should I pine, like the Arabian princess in the midst of her fairy palace, for the impossible roc's egg which is to make it perfect? Shall I not be content with my fairy palace; and with the fairies, too, which haunt it? With those noble children for whom I live, growing before me day by day in beauty and in virtue; with the friendship of heroical spirits, the converse of worthy scholars, the love of villagers, whom I have trained from childhood to fear their God and honour their Queen? Shall I not be content with this pleasant parsonage study, and its shelves full of books, grand old classics, and grander old divines? With the lawn sloping to the broad river, my trim flower-beds and standard roses, "laburnum dropping gold," the deep avenues of lime beyond, and royal Hover towering over all amid the black peaks of those mighty pines?—Yes, noble house, and noble souls that dwell therein—not in vain for myself, and not in vain, thank God, for you, did I come hither as a raw college lad full forty years ago. Under your gracious shadow I will dwell content till I slip away, once for all, into the little churchyard close at hand and lay down there the not unpleasant burden of mortality.

Forty years ago. That, I suppose, is the point at which I should begin; at the spring day in the year

Digitized by Google

1829, on which I got upon the mail to start, as I fancied, friendless out into the wide world. With what a homeless heart I went forth! Mother, brothers, sister, all gone. And now my father gone, too, gone after them and I left alone in the world, with a lame foot and an asthmatic cough to warn me that my life might be as short and as painful as that of my brothers had been. My darling ambition, too—the thing for which I had lived ever since I was seven years old—the hope of a high degree and a college fellowship, quashed as it seemed, utterly and for ever. Yes—that was a dark day for me. And yet how kind people were to me, and how good—kind and good, as I have found mankind, even in the midst of their many faults, throughout my life.

How the old Master smiled with kindly triumph, when he told me he had secured me the post of tutor to young Lord Hartover. Told me he knew that I should always keep up the credit of the college, there as elsewhere; all that I had to do now, was to play my cards well, save money, come back and take a fine degree and settle into a fat college fellow. How he insisted on lending me twenty pounds; which I needed, for my father's death had left me penniless. How kind the men, too, were! How the fellow-commoners, who had not deigned to speak to me while I was the ambitious sizar and expected wrangler, shook hands with me; and said—I cannot tell why—that they were sorry to lose me. How my friends insisted on giving me a farewell breakfast, ere I mounted the mail; and would surely have made me

Digitized by Google

drink champagne in the morning, had I not been, from health rather than from inclination, a Nazarite from my birth. Kind souls! their good-nature increased my loneliness. In leaving Cambridge, I had left all I knew, all I cared for on earth; and, as the coach rolled away along the Huntingdon road, I looked back at the spires of King's College and the dark walls of elm and chestnut as an emigrant looks back on the white cliffs of England, perhaps for the last time.

I knew but little of the people and place whither I was going. The old Master, I saw, knew more than he chose to tell me. He had been tutor, in former days, to Lord Dongmoor, father of my future charge; but he would give me no information as to the character of the Earl. Only one hint he did give, with a knowing smile, as he dismissed me—"not, if I could help it, to fall in love with her ladyship!"—Her ladyship, as I understood, was not Lord Hartover's mother, but a second wife. Of Lord Hartover himself he told me nothing: but a fellow-commoner had wished me joy of my pupil, with a shrug and a sneer, and informed me for my comfort that the "fellow was sent away from Harrow—you'll soon find out what for"—news which was ill calculated to raise my spirits. For the rest, I only knew that Hover was a very grand place, and he who owned it a mighty prince, possessor of half a county, of coal mines, of factory towns, and, so they said, more than a hundred thousand a year, of which last I was to receive for my labours, two hundred pounds

Digitized by Google

—so good a bargain had the dear Master made for me, in consideration—as he told me in after years—of my reputed virtues, and the exceeding naughtiness of my pupil whom no man living, it was supposed, could manage.

I recollect how that day, as the coach rolled along the wearisome road, I tried to "take stock," as it were, of my own capabilities for training this indomitable young viscount, and how my heart sank within me so short did the list appear! Very uncertain health; a lame leg; a hesitating mode of speech which would have been a stammer, without great care on my part;—altogether, as my class and my school-fellows had informed me long ago, as poor insignificant a little body as any sturdy labourer need wish to compare with his own, and glorify himself—if it be any comfort to him—with the contrast. And, for the furnishing of the said poor little carcass, what were there? A fair quantity of Latin, Greek, and mathematics, certainly. It would have been a shame to me otherwise; for I had read nothing but Latin and Greek ever since I could read at all. There was, too, thanks to a life of severe toil, the habit of steady application; and perhaps, I hoped, something of the priceless "art of learning," which I felt must stand me in good stead, henceforth, if I was to succeed. For I was journeying into a new world, a new planet, and I really knew less of its laws than I did of those which rule Jupiter or the moon. Dreary and blank looked that unknown world ahead of me; I seemed to myself a frail little cock-boat, without

Digitized by Google

chart, without even knowing my own destination, thrusting out upon a boundless sea—whither?

I never was a superstitious or even an excitable person; nor was I overfond of those special petitions —supposed to draw down in return special interpositions from Heaven—upon which my evangelical friends at Cambridge used to build so much. I could ask for strength and wisdom to do what I knew to be right; but I shrank from thrusting upon a God Who gives me every day and all day long more than I deserve, rash entreaties for this and that fancied benefit over and above. Still I take no shame to myself when I confess that, closing my eyes and leaning back as I sat on the coach-top, I prayed earnestly—more earnestly than ever before in my life—to be kept out of temptation, and to be taught how to do my duty as a tutor though I had scantiest notion what that duty might be. Humbled by the sense of my own loneliness, ignorance, incapacity, I cast myself on the thought that I had a Father in Heaven; and found, as I have found ever since, an inexhaustible spring of comfort in the thought.

Amid such meditations I sat patiently the weary day, mile after mile, stage after stage, through the monotonous roll of the Mercian grass-lands till, at even-fall, I began to see the moors piled against the western sky. The coach stopped at last, in darkness, in a tidy little country town which was Hartover.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II

I GOT down at the comfortable looking Longmoor Hut Inn, and asked for a conveyance to Hover. There was none I was informed, in tones of respect and sympathy, that "they were very sorry and so forth, but all the flys were gone to Hover already. That they had never expected a gentleman so late or they would have procured one on purpose."

That I should be late for the ball; what a pity!

"The finest thing, sir!" said the landlady, seeming ready to weep over my disappointment, "that has been seen in this country for ten years—that's to say, it will be; for I drove over this very afternoon, and saw all the preparations, because the housekeeper's my cousin, sir"—And so forth and so on.

"My dear madam," quoth I, "I do not think that the ball will lose much from my not being there. You see, I am not a dancing man"—and I glanced my eye down at my poor foot, and saw her woman's eye follow, and light up with a pleasant motherly expression of interest and pity—"but I am very anxious indeed to get to Lord Longmoor's to-night."

"Well, no wonder, no wonder. Sad to lose such a sight!"

"But Mr. Braithwaite's in the Commercial Room, and just going," whispered her stalwart husband, "and if he——"

Digitized by Google

"What? that Radical scum?—And to take a gentleman up to my lord's, who can't hear his name without cursing, poor dear soul? What are you thinking of?"

"Well!" said the big Boniface—"I always do say Mr. Braithwaite's a very sensible, free spoken gentleman——"

"Gentleman!" quoth she with a scornful emphasis. "What's he but a tenant farmer?"

"Still I was sorry when he and his lordship fell out."

"And so was I," answered a voice from behind.

Turning, I saw a tall figure, wrapt in a drab driving-coat with seven capes, as was the fashion of the time.

"What am I wanted for?" The landlady drew back. "I heard all, Mrs. Plummer, and found that, as usual, listeners hear no good of themselves."

"Well, sir—why, sir—I'm sure, sir!" said Boniface, while his wife was proudly silent—"But women will meddle with politics——"

"So much the better. If they did not, politics would be very stupid things. So this gentleman wants to go to Hover?"

"And all the flys are out."

"And therefore I must take him, eh?"

"My dear sir," I said, "I could not think of such a thing."

"But I can. If you don't like my company, well and good. I can do without yours. But if you have

Digitized by Google

no objection to it, I shall be glad enough of a companion."

"But I shall be taking you out of your way."

"Only a mile or so, and what is that in the country? Now! Where's your luggage? A portmanteau and that box. Good. Put them under the dennet-seat, ostler. As for that big box——"

"It is far too heavy, my dear sir. It is full of books."

"Books, eh? Then you must send it by the coach in the morning, Plummer. Now are you ready?"

And, without more ado, we rattled off through the streets pleasantly enough, to the light of our own lamps, with a fast-stepping horse before us.

I, of course, wished to get into conversation with my new acquaintance, but I hardly knew how to begin. However he forestalled me by breaking out abruptly, as soon as we were outside of the little town—

"A box full of books, eh? And to what end, pray, are you carrying coals to Newcastle?"

"Are there many books at Hover, then?"

"One of the finest private libraries in England, they say, and never looked into from year's end to year's end. And then the aristocracy are surprised that the public envies them, and so forth! Was the cow much to be blamed, sir, when she envied the dog in the manger?"

"I shall take good care that there is someone to read them in future," I said joyfully enough.

"What, are you a scholar?"

Digitized by Google

"I am just from Cambridge."

"Full of Latin, Greek, and mathematics, or of Newmarket and rat-hunting? Which?"

"Certainly not of the latter. Equally certainly not half enough of the former."

"Latin and Greek? Ah! there you fellows have the whip-hand of us manufacturing men after all. Humph—And what good are your classics going to do you at this ball?"

"I am not going to the ball," said I, laughing. "I am going to be private tutor to Lord Hartover."

"Wheugh! And what are you going to teach him?"

"I have not the slightest notion," I answered, laughing again. "A little Latin and Greek I suppose—and also to be a good boy—if I have the chance."

"Poor devil!"

"Which? He or I?"

"Well—both of you, I should say. Curious custom in England—is it not—that the more responsibility anyone has the less education is required to meet it. A farmer has to learn his trade from youth. A law-shark must begin by snapping at minnows for seven years or so before he is considered fit to swallow big fish. But your nobleman is taken for granted. Anyone can manage half a county. At Cambridge, I hear, you common sons of earth—for, I presume I have not the honour of speaking to a nobleman, or even to a squire in prospect?"

"Most distinctly not. I haven't a thing in the

Digitized by Google

world but what I carry on my back and in my boxes and my brains."

"Well—you common sons of earth require three years to get your degree. Your young noblemen only two, eh?"

"True."

"Then what hope have you of educating this lad, when society itself and the very divines of your English Church are telling him that he need not be educated? Where is the use of selling your liberty, becoming a flunkey and a hanger-on of these great folk when you know that you can't do what you profess to do, because you won't be allowed to do it?"

I was inclined to be nettled. But why be angry? The man was in the act of doing me a kindness. He was evidently no ordinary person. And, after all, it is not often in this world that one has the chance of hearing the plain truth. Therefore I answered—

"I sell my liberty, sir, because I am a penniless orphan, and must live. What my duty by this boy may be I do not know; but I suppose God will show me. And if He does show me I suppose that He will give me sense and courage to do it."

My companion turned round sharply on me, and looked at me keenly from under his hat. The night was so bright that we could both see each other plainly enough.

At last he spoke.

"If you talk in that way, young man, and mean what you say, you have come where you are wanted. I did not intend to offend you."

Digitized by Google

"You have not offended me in the least. I am glad to hear truth; for——"

I checked myself, since I was about to say I did not expect to hear any more for some time to come.

He was silent again. Then turning in his abrupt way—

"God will show you your duty, you think? Very good; but you don't expect special revelations or instructions direct from on high?"

"No."

"Then what if He showed you by the plain mouth of a rational man, old enough to be your father?"

"A very likely method," I replied. "Have you any advice to give me?"

"I have. People call me a Radical and a destructive. I know what I am; and this I know—I don't like these great noblemen. I consider them a great national evil. But here they are; and we can't get rid of them."

"Perhaps because we ought not?"

"Perhaps so. I have altered my opinions in my life on most things, and may alter them again. But here these noblemen are, and will be: and our business—your business, rather—is to make the best of them, by making them the best they can be. Try to make that lad a good nobleman—never mind his Latin and Greek, or anything else but what will forward your doing so."

"To that end I should have to know what a nobleman ought to be."

"Then find out. Of what use is your scholarship

Digitized by Google

to you, if it won't teach you that? I have read history enough to see that there have been, in all ages, men possessed of arbitrary power and exclusive rank to which they had no right—yet they used their rank and power well. That poor boy will have power—immense power—to which he has no more right than his own groom. Teach him for his own sake, as well as for half a county's sake, to use it well, and to be a good nobleman if a nobleman he must be. Do that. And work enough you'll have to do it."

"How so?"

"He is an awful pickle, they say—small wonder, with the example he gets. You have heard, of course, how he served your wretched predecessor?"

"No."

"Ah ha! If you had perhaps you would not be here. Threw him out of the window, and then stood a regular siege in his own room, threatening to shoot anyone who entered; till he capitulated at last on a full pardon, and marched out with colours flying and a double-barrel gun over his shoulder."

"Alas for me! But I am not likely to infuriate him to trying physical force."

"So much the better. There, let's talk of something else.—Gate ho!"

We had reached the lodge of the Enchanted Castle.

Gates opened to us beneath the shadow of enormous trees, and we drove in.

"How far are we from the house?"

"Only three miles. Three miles of good land between us and the big men, wasted upon deer and

Digitized by Google

game, instead of growing corn and turnips.—Humph."

We drove on for some time again in silence through the park—Hartover Chase, as my companion called it—over open heather and moor, sparkling with glow-worms, where the night-jar flapped and twisted under our horse's nose, and then flitted away ghostly into the dark to churr like a stocking loom; past deep gulfs of black wood, through which rose the tinkle of hidden rills; along black avenues of pine, our lamps flashing blood-red upon their elephantine stems, till we saw, right in front, what appeared to me at first a great square mountain, black against the dappled cloud and pierced with fine oblong sheets of blazing light.

"Can that be the house? It must be a huge pile."

"It is so. And those are the fine windows of the great hall, where they are caracoling and caprioling now. Yes, young man, there is the Enchanted Castle, and the Enchantress in it at the height of her sorceries. Take care that she does not enchant you."

"What do you mean?"

"You will find out soon enough, sir. I only say, take care lest you go the way which as fine young fellows as you, for aught I know, have gone already. No—don't ask me any more."

I thought it well to change the subject.

"You consider this land, then, as wasted?"

"Of course I do."

And then began a conversation upon matters for which the reader will not care. On farming, rural

Digitized by Google

economy, the state of the poor, which he represented as frightful; and, lastly, on the proposed new Poor Law, then just being agitated, and of which, I found, my companion was a strong supporter. We were in the midst of a discussion equally new and interesting to me, when he pulled up at a large pair of iron gates.

"Here, we will go in the back way. The flunkies are all upstairs by now, and we may chance to find a groom here. Now, I hope our last quarter of an hour has shown you a little of what a nobleman might do?"

"It has indeed," said I, sadly enough.

"Don't be downhearted. Perhaps there were no flys at Hartover for a very good reason."

"I am thankful enough there were none."

"Then come and see me when you can. I am but three miles off. Though if you wish to keep on good terms with these folk, you had best neither say that you are coming or that I brought you here. So perhaps you will prefer not risking further acquaintance while you stay in the Enchanted Castle?"

I assured him earnestly that was not the case and, getting down, rang the bell. There was a noise of bustle enough inside; but no sign of the door being opened.

At last someone came across from what seemed to be the stables—a short stout bandy-legged man, lanthorn in hand.

"Wha's here now?" asked he in broad Yorkshire.

"Warcop, is it you?" said Mr. Braithwaite.

Digitized by Google

"Mr. Braithwaite! Wha'd ha' thought o' meeting you this time o' night! I was just roun' to see t' harses all safe; for my lads 'll be all drunk by now, a murrain on 'em."

"And here of all places, eh? I've brought over my lord's new tutor, as there was no fly at Plummer's."

"Just like you. I'll get the lad's things out in a minute——"

"Do—for fear I should be caught and put under the pump, eh?" and he laughed.

To which Warcop answered, with a strong word, that they were all much too busy, "playing Bedlam up there with their dancing and their suppering, to fash themselves with honest men like you and me."

The two shook hands. Mr. Warcop led me in, and began shouting in a voice of command—

"Here, you lazy Southron towlers! What are you licking your fingers owre t' dishes for, and my lord's new tutor waiting outside, wi' nebbod to carry up his porkmankle? An' here's t' grey mare's feet never stapt, and t' lanthorn alight in t' saddle room. 'Od, but I'll discharge the lot of ye the morn, and groom t' harses myself."

Whereon out shambled, from some servants' hall, three or four crab-legged grooms in drab, who seemed all of them a little the worse for liquor.

"Hoot, ye tykes! I'll carry the gentleman's porkmankle up myself. An' when I come down again, the lad o' ye that's not in bed shall gang the morn. Why are ye no happed up this hour? Ye're no wanted to

Digitized by Google

rin at the lasses' hocks like they flunkies upstairs.—Come wi' me, sir!"

And I went with him—up stairways, through swing doors, along galleries—stairs, swing doors, galleries—till I was utterly bewildered. At last I laughed.

"What are ye laughing for then?"

"I couldn't help thinking that if I wanted to run away I was as safe as in any gaol; for find my way out of this place again I could not."

"Hoots—there's many another has said the same, and had cause to say it," quoth Warcop, in meaning earnest.

The third time that that warning had come—from the Master, from Mr. Braithwaite, and now from a servant of the family.

We stopped at last in a large room, somewhat low, but spacious and pleasant.

"This'll be your sitting-room, I suppose," as he put down the luggage. "Yonder's my lord's bedroom; and this, I take it, will be yours. At least I heard Mr. Marsigli say so to his lordship's valet. The tyke's in the supper-room now, I'll warrant, sipping champagne on the sly. Now, sir, will ye eat or drink?"

No—I had dined already.

"Not a glass o' spirits then, before ye go to bed?"

"No, I seldom drink anything but water."

"Ye dinnot?" and he looked fixedly at me. "Then ye're t' man for this hoos."

"I shall sit up till Lord Hartover comes to bed."

"Ye will?"—with another fixed look. "Well,

Digitized by Google

mayhap it's better, mayhap it's better. But ye'll no be hard on t' poor lad?"

"Hard on him? Why?"

"Well, ye see," in an apologetic tone. "He's a pretty lad as ever crossed a pigskin, let wha will be t' other. But he ne'er had a mammy, ye see, poor lad. Ne'er had a mammy. She died when he was born, sir, worse pity for him and all the country-side; for an angel unto heaven she was, body and soul. But that is no use to him, sir, unless she prays for him at whiles up in paradise, as I oft times think she must——"

And the man's voice, which had become tenderer and tenderer with every word, quite faltered.

I looked at him. He was evidently some sort of superintendent of horses—stud-groom, as I found out afterwards, was the name of his office. His face below was like that of a bulldog, square and heavy-jawed, with beetling brows over smooth shaved cheeks, brick-red from sun and rain, and eyes of humour and considerable cunning, too. Above all was a very large brain, covered with crisp grey hair, like that of a wiry terrier.—I was surprised at the union of such a brain with such a jaw. Unaccustomed to horsey men, and therefore prejudiced against them, I was not aware of the amount of character which is both required and called out in the higher branches of the great English horse-world. I have seen plenty of it since, as these pages will show; but I never yet saw either stud-groom, huntsman, or whip, worth his place, who was not at the same time very clever, and

Digitized by Google

very determined.—A drab shooting jacket over a chest of great breadth, and drab breeches and gaiters upon legs bent nearly to half-moons, completed the outward man of my new friend—for friend I felt he would be, if only for the sentiment which had just glimmered through his most unsentimental outside.

He bowed himself out civilly. I offered him, I hardly knew why, my hand. He took it, and his face lightened up.

"Ye seem a civil sober young gentleman by your face. Now, try to be a father to t' dear lad, and make a mon of him; and dinnot ye, dinnot ye fash him wi' over much skeuling."

I smiled, and promised to do my best.

"Now," I said, "stop and tell me one thing more; unless you want to go to bed?"

"Na. He had na mind to hap up, till he was sure t' hoos wadna be burnt owre his head wi' drunken flunkies. What did I want?"

"First—who was that Mr. Braithwaite that brought me here?"

"A canny Yorkshireman and true. Out to Craven, where he—the speaker—too cam fra. And na better friend to gentle or simple if they'd take 'tent by him. But he was like wisdom crying in the streets, and nebbody'd hearken."

"Was he a farmer?"

"Yes—now—And no such farmer round, with his steam engines and his machinery. They brak 'em for him a' twice, and he just monded them and went on. There's no daunting a Yorkshireman. But he was

Digitized by Google

rich enough once, and had a busy mill by Leeds somewhere, I've heard say. But my lord—that's my young lord's father—winnot abide him because he's a Radical, more's the pity. But he and I are good friends, for we are both from canny Craven, ye see."

I did not care to ask more, for I was really very tired; and let the good man go.

I looked round the room, which, I soon found, was in sad confusion. Cigar ashes and ends on the chimney-piece, whips and spurs lying about. A terrier before the fire, who woke and all but bit me.—I must put it somewhat to rights to-morrow, if I was to spend the next year or so of my life in it.—Books there were none, save a tattered Latin grammar and dictionary, and some French novels which I could not understand, and an abominable book called "Tom and Jerry," which I had once glanced at at Cambridge, and vowed to burn on the first opportunity. The walls were covered with prints and caricatures, pasted on; and I entertained myself with looking at these for a full hour. The prints were chiefly French, Opera girls and such like. Many of them I would rather not have found in the room of a boy of sixteen. But I knew that there is a licence on that point in great houses which it is in vain to combat; and I suspected already, what I am now certain of, namely, that the licence which the upper classes permit as to pictures and statues is far less hurtful than the prudery of the middle-class. You must either destroy such things or accustom young people to them. The former is impossible.

Digitized by Google

The latter is therefore the wiser, and perhaps the purer, method.

The caricatures, however, amused me, I being too tired in body and mind to care for anything but amusement. They were principally sporting ones by Bunbury, Broadstow, North, and Alken; and I spent my time so pleasantly in watching unhappy gentlemen tumbling over enormous rails, or triumphant ones sweeping over, to me, impossible brooks, that I forgot my fatigue until long after the clock on the mantel-piece had struck one. Little did I think that within six months I should be sharing, club-foot and all, the joys and sorrows of those red-coated heroes on the walls.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III

I WAS just settling down again to wait in patience for my pupil's advent, when there came a tap at the door and Warcop re-entered.

"I beg pardon, sir, but they've done supper and I thought you might like to have a look at the ball."

"I should certainly, if I can do so without intruding."

"Oh! that's easy enough from this room, if you don't mind meeting a trifle of backstairs company."

He piloted me down winding stone steps, along a passage, and by a swing-door through which came sounds of music and revelry.

This brought us into a low dark gallery—in which I made out two or three female figures, upper servants as I supposed bent on the same errand as ourselves—whence we looked down, over a waist-high parapet, at such a sight as I had never seen before.

A vast hall, more than a hundred feet long and some fifty broad. Round three sides of it, high in the wall, ran a clerestory, under the arches of which we now stood. At the opposite end violins screamed and brazen trumpets brayed. On the fourth side tall mullioned windows, almost from ceiling to ground, reflected the lights in their coloured panes. As to the ceiling—I had no time to look at it then, though it is, so architects say, one of the finest Tudor ceilings

Digitized by Google

in England, for my eyes were drawn down at once to the living garden below, which surged to and fro between lemon and orange trees laden with golden fruit, and masses of gaudy flowers piled against the wall—not so gaudy though as the human flowers beside them, who whirled in the dance like brilliant humming-birds. A fairy palace in truth, thought I to myself, as I gazed and gazed, dazzled with light and movement and colour. And no wonder, for, over and above the gay dresses of the ladies, the men were all dressed in red coats and tight nankeen breeches. Half of the red coats, I saw, had black collars, half of them blue; while many of them, far from being new, were stained and soiled exceedingly. The mass of red tired the eye, and forced it to rest for refreshment on the green of the shrubs around.

As for the women, they would have looked prettier—I must say it—now, than they did then. For that was the day of short petticoats, gigot sleeves, high waists, and hair frizzed up and out like that of Juvenal's Roman dames. Among the many improvements which I have seen in my time, I must value—though, old fogy as I am, what can it matter to me! —the improvement in ladies' dress. Old fogy that I am? Well—I was a young fogy then; but born, like Falstaff, "an old man," their dress was as unimportant to me in the year 1829 as it is to-day. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the sight thoroughly. Why not? God had made them, and all their youth, health, and happiness. God had made their silks and satins, jewels, and flowers too. Why then grudge them a

Digitized by Google

moment's pleasure? What was it to me that they were enjoying themselves in a way impossible to me, the poor lame scholar? Every man has his gift, and his compensation. I had mine already in the thought of the splendid library. This affair was not in my line. True, but the world would be a barren place indeed had it no line but mine. Let life be as broad as it can. And so let them dance, and flirt, I say; and Heaven's blessing on all they do right, and Heaven's mercy on all they do wrong.

I watched and watched, as greedily as a boy at a pantomime, till Warcop, who was evidently enjoying the scene as much as I, whispered to me, quite awe-struck:

"An' what do ye think o' that?"

"That is the most beautiful sight I ever saw in my life."

"Ah! ha! ha! you've spoken truth. I've been in a' the greatest houses in England, forbye Windsor Castle itself i' the owd King's time, and I dinnot say but what there are twa or three can cap us, but nae mair! And we've getten the money, and no afraid to spend it."

Here one of the women I had noticed when first entering the gallery approached, walked past us leisurely, with a pretty mincing tread, turned on reaching the swing-door and began sauntering back. She was young, trimly though fashionably dressed in rustling black silk. I caught a glance of flashing black eyes in a pale handsome face.

"My lady's French Mamzell Fédore trying to

Digitized by Google

size up my young lord's new tutor," Warcop growled under his breath. His tone surprised and somewhat displeased me. But he spoke, as I judged, less to me than to himself, so I let it pass and, to change the subject, asked him the meaning of the red coats.

"What? Didn't ye ken this is the twa hunts' ball?"

"No—you must remember I am a new-comer."

"Aye, aye. Well ye see latter end o' season we brought fox out o' Thatcher's Gorse.—Ye'll no ken Thatcher's Gorse, in course?—Well, it's far side our country and we were into t' Bramhall coverts in ten minutes. Bramhall was drawing and picked fox oop. We picked him oop same moment. I'd sweart' owd Challenger—badger-pied hound he is—brought him oop to t' side and into Bramhall pack. They say he didn't—I say he did. And, 'od, sir! we were both out together."

What his story meant, I could not clearly understand then. I learnt to know well enough in after years.

"'Od, sir, and there we was," he repeated. "Twa packs o' hounds and twa fields o' gentlemen. And wha'll see two better? Ten thousand pounds' worth o' horse-flesh, a' i' the lump and a' racing."

Here Mr. Warcop clenched his outstretched fist, as if overcome with the magnificence of his recollections.

"Omm—I should like any of the Johnny Crapauds"—with a glance at Mademoiselle, still lingering in our neighbourhood—"or their cavalry to ha'

Digitized by Google

lass below her, wi' my lord John, she's a yeoman's daughter—and finely they dance, too."

I looked with increased interest at the stalwart young fellow, with huge black whiskers and the figure of a life-guardsman, with whom Her Magnificence was just leading off, chatting, and tossing back her beautiful head, while the poor fool, half sheepish, half proud of his own good looks and good fortune, was dancing away—just as well as anyone else—evidently in the seventh heaven of harmless vanity. Though—was it harmless?—At all events here was none of that gulf between class and class of which I had heard; and I whispered something of the kind to the shrewd Yorkshireman.

As I expected he had his answer ready.

"Omm—Your real quality ha' gotten so muckle dignity, that they can just let it a' take care o' itself. It's only your newcomer upstarts, that ha' gotten but little, that must needs nurse it, like plant in a pot, for fear it wither. An' I'll warrant some wither it often enough, with the saut tears o' envy, hatred, and malice—Eh, Mamzell? Isn't that a bonny young *paysan,* as you ca' them, that my leddy's dancing wi'?"

This to the Frenchwoman who, coming closer, had taken her stand by his side, looking down, simpering yet supercilious—as I fancied—at the scene below—

"*Tiens!—beau garçon, mais horriblement mal mis.*"

"I can't understand your lingo, ye ken."

Digitized by Google

"But a very—how do you say?—ill-dressed boy. And the woman *paysannes*—augh!—how they are badly put. What guys they have make themselves—augh!"

"You'd like well enough to be dancing among them though," said Warcop, who seemed to have a peculiar spite against handsome Mademoiselle.

"And I hope I could dance better than those clumsy things, and dress myself better, too."

"Fine feathers make foul birds," quoth Warcop under his breath.

"And what *canaille* for nobles to dance with!" she went on.

"The grapes are a bit sour, Mamzell," quoth Warcop, this time not under his breath.

"But where is his lordship?" asked I, not wishing to witness a quarrel.

"Eh! I haven't seen him since supper. You'll see him come in soon—a pretty lad—owre white a bit; but ribbed up like a northern hound and thoroughbred as Eclipse."

"I mean the Earl, his father——"

"Omm! Did ye no ken then? Poor dear gentleman! He's to bed since ten o'clock. He always is happed up at ten, wi' flannel to his legs and flannel to his head, any time this dozen years. God send him good rest to-night!"

There was a tone in Warcop's voice which I could not fathom—whether compassionate or contemptuous, or both. However, it was clear the great gen-

Digitized by Google

tleman's absence was not important to the company. It might prove so, though, to me.

"But why's my young lord no here yet?" Warcop said again, looking over the groups below. "Mamzell, ha' ye seen Lord Hartover t'-night?"

Mademoiselle muttered something about it's being no business of hers. To which Warcop replied sternly—

"I never said 'twas; but tha's no reason ye mightn't ken. I'll go and see." And off he went.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, during which I looked on. Warcop had not been gone five minutes before Mademoiselle began on me.

"*N'est-ce pas beau, Monsieur? Magnifique?*"

"I am sorry to say that I do not understand French."

I little knew then how important a confession I had made. Little knew how bitterly I should regret, hereafter, my ignorance of the language of the modern world, which, much as I love the dear old University—my mother once, now my bride—I must say she ought to teach us if it be but for three months, and to a fairly apt scholar no more is required.

"Ah! well, I can talk a little Englees. Is it not a beautiful sight? And, *Miladi?* Is she not superb?"

"Most superb," I answered quite honestly. "I never yet saw so beautiful a person, or one so beautifully dressed."

"Ah! la! la! But, my charming gentleman, a double compliment! The first to her, the next to me!

Digitized by Google

The first I shall give her. The ozer I will keep for my own *pauvre* self."

And she began chatting away to me most agreeably.

Men are often laughed at for befooling themselves with women. I think women befool themselves just as much with men. If women see through men, so do men through women unless their own vanity or lust blinds them. I did not talk ten minutes with that Frenchwoman. She said nothing to me which a pure-minded person might not have said, and all, too, with a grace and sprightliness which was as irreproachable as it was engaging. Yet I felt she was bad, wanton, false, though I could not tell why. Perhaps Warcop's tone had prejudiced me against her. No—I believe that without Warcop's leading I should have found it out for myself.

However Warcop came back, and stood beside me silent for some minutes.

"*Où est donc Milord, vieux boule-dogue?*"

"I don't understand your lingo; but I do understand you call me a bulldog, Mamzell. And the bulldog will be even with you."

"*Va, vieux fat,*"—and she added a few more epithets, laughing in the prettiest way the whole time, and then rustled off into the next archway.

Warcop looked round quietly.

"You'd better go up to your room soon, sir."

"I will."

"Only—I say—don't be hard on t' poor lad."

"I won't, trust me."

Digitized by Google

And I went away not knowing what he meant.

I soon knew. I had not been back a quarter of an hour before there was a scuffle in the passage outside the door. I was in the bedroom, unpacking my portmanteau, and stayed there, uncertain what to do and not a little nervous at the prospect of my first introduction to my pupil.

The sitting-room door was burst open, and the scuffling increased. Two voices, both thick with wine, were muttering and arguing.

"Now don't, my lord—pray don't—and go to bed quietly."

"Let me alone, Will—I must see the beggar, I say. Hullo! Mr. Tutor. Where are you? Let's have a look at you!"

I came out instantly, and met in the doorway the most beautiful boy of seventeen I ever had seen, or ever, I believe, shall see, looking all the more beautiful from being dressed in that most becoming of garments, a red coat. The likeness to a well-known hero of my studies struck me so instantly and strongly that I found myself saying under my breath "Alcibiades!" The flushed cheeks, the staggering steps, all added to the likeness; combined as they were with an air of habitual command, and the half-lazy, half-saucy lift of the head.—A new Alcibiades, breaking in upon—certainly no Socrates! God help me! if this was the young creature I had to tame, who was I indeed to tame him?

Yet I loved him at first sight, and instinctively, dear boy. He knows, and Heaven knows, that I have

Digitized by Google

never ceased to love him. Perhaps, as contraries are always attracted by contraries, I loved him from his utter and complete contrast to myself. Whether it were so or not, he was aware of the contrast as quickly as I. He stared at me for a moment, trying to look sober, and then cried—

"Hey! A poor little"—I will not repeat the words he used—"And a lame leg, too, by Jove! I don't think he'll give me much trouble, William!"

My face burnt red; but I tried to laugh—

"I think, my lord, you had better go to bed."

No, he wouldn't go to bed. He wanted more champagne. He would this; he would that. And then he began singing verses of little French songs. And so on and so on, for nearly half an hour, while the footman, I saw to my surprise, had slipped away and left me to manage the boy alone.

And I did manage him. By wheedling, humouring, laughing and joking, though with a heavy heart. I undressed him and put him into bed. There he murmured snatches of song, called two or three times for Fédore—the name of the French lady's-maid as I remembered—and finally fell, to my inexpressible relief, into a heavy sleep.

I sat by him watching the beautiful face, all pale and fallen now, when I heard the door open lightly and Mademoiselle's head looked in.

She gave a little start, I thought, at seeing me; but spoke in her sweetest tone.

"Ah! *bon.* Monsieur is with him. That is kind. And Milord sleeps?"

Digitized by Google

"Yes," said I, laying my finger on my lips.

She did not seem inclined to go. I verily believe she was going to try to chatter to me; but, at that moment, heavy footsteps sounded along the passage, whereupon she vanished instantly.

It was William the footman. In he came with a drunken leer, an unopened champagne bottle, and three or four glasses; clutched together in his shaking hand.

"I've got it," he whispered with an oath. "And we'll make a night of it, we will."

I rose instantly, and whispered in my turn.

"If you don't get out this moment, you drunken scoundrel, I'll break that bottle over your head, and kick you downstairs afterwards"—and I looked him fiercely in the face.

It was a vain threat; for the fellow was six foot high and as heavy again as I. But I suppose my eye quelled him, for he turned and, grumbling, sneaked out like a beaten cur.

I locked the door after him and sat down again to watch that fine pale face, tired out in body and mind, trying to think, and trying, too, to pray. But a feeling akin to despair had come over me. What a beginning to my work! And into what a chaos was I thrown—I, the mere scholar! Happily for me, overcome by bodily fatigue, I soon fell fast asleep in my chair.

I was wakened by the roll of many wheels. The guests were departing. It was broad day.

The boy slept still, heavily, quietly. I might well

Digitized by Google

leave him for an hour or so. I went off to find cold water, and drank and bathed, till both body and mind were somewhat cooled and refreshed after the long day and strange night's work.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV

THAT duty performed, I dressed, and, as I dressed, looked out of the window to see where I was.

If my imagination had been stirred the night before, it was stirred still more this morning.

My room was in the north-western block of the enormous Elizabethan building, compared to which all houses which I had yet seen—and I have seen a few larger since—seemed as cottages. The house appeared, at the first glance, to rise sheer out of a desolate wilderness; but the pleasant sound of a mower's scythe below made me look down, and I saw that between me and the forest was a lawn of some twenty yards broad, broken by beds of rhododendrons and azaleas, now in their full glory of pink and lilac, flame colour and yellow. Beyond them, knots of cultivated heath harmonised with the wild heath outside; and young pines, of all the kinds which are now common in English parks, prepared the eye for the ancient Scotch firs beyond the wire fence. But how can I describe these!

My notion of a Scotch fir had been taken from the tall umbrellas which one saw in artists' paintings. But these were varied in shape as they were gigantic in size. Some domed, others throwing broken plumed crests against the sky, the boles of them purple, the trunks and branches glistening red and

Digitized by Google

orange, no two alike, yet combining to form a nobly harmonious whole. As I stood in the second floor window, nearly on a level with their heads, I seemed to look along a black alp range.

An avenue of them, evidently the dark cathedral aisle I had come through last night, stretched from the centre of the north front and straight away across the moor. This without hiding the distance, for right and left my eye carried forward, through gaps and vistas, over a brown heather sea, rolling higher and higher, as it grew more distant, till it ended in a long purple bar against the fair blue of the northern horizon. And on all, the newly risen sun poured floods of light—over dewy heather slopes, between the ruddy fir stems, upon vivid green glades of newly-sprung bracken and the swinging horns of lazy deer.

I turned at last, and went to the western window. What a contrast was below me!

The moor broke into glens, and swept down to the south, its upper knolls crowned with huge oaks and beeches, and at their feet, sheltered from every wind, a paradise of art. I could see walks winding around well-kept shrubberies, fountains flinging rainbow-tinted columns of delicate spray, marble white-paved pools gleaming amidst dark laurel banks; and, nearer to the house, terraces filled with flower beds of every quaint shape and lovely hue which vied with the fantastic patterns of some Indian shawl or changeful plumage of some tropic bird. On every side was the same gradual, yet startling, change

Digitized by Google

from the savage grandeur of Nature to the brilliance, grace, homelike comfort, of Art. A master's hand, I thought, must surely have been here—or probably that of master after master; for, as I recollected, it had taken three hundred years of wealth and thought to make that glorious place what I now saw it.

Leaving my room, and descending the winding stone stairs—down which Warcop had piloted me last night—to the ground level, I found a narrow doorway and iron-studded oak door,—the latter happily unlocked—which gave access to the terrace immediately below my windows.

The neatness and finish of the garden was miraculous; and I saw at once that it was attained by a lavish expenditure of labour, for I passed at least half a dozen men, busily at work, in the small part of the grounds which I traversed.

Passing from the terrace and following one of the many gravel paths, I came at last to a semicircular stone bench set against a high screen of clipped yew. Before it stretched a long rectangular lawn of velvet turf, now beaded with dew, which from its shape I took to be a bowling-green. The air was full of the song of birds, while the sound of the morning breeze in the great fir avenue reached me, at moments, in a delicate long drawn whisper. I stood listening, charmed by the poetic beauty of my surroundings, when I was startled by a harsh voice close at my ear.

Digitized by Google

"And wha' will you be, young man, here in her ladyship's private grounds?"

I turned and saw a tall bony figure, clothed in seedy black. The man looked, at the first sight, not unlike a Dissenting preacher: but hobnailed boots, a pruning knife in his hand, and strings of bass mat round his neck proclaimed him the Scotch gardener.

"I am Lord Hartover's new tutor, arrived last night. I hope I am not trespassing. But I thought there could be no chance of meeting anyone at this hour; and really the place looked so beautiful from my window, that I could no more keep out of it than Milton's Satan out of Paradise."

"Satan out o' Pawradise? A very apt quotation," —and he made me a profound bow. "Say no more, sir, you're as welcome as would be my young lord himself did he care to tak' note o' these goodly embellishments o' his ain and his ancestors' property. And ye'll be a thoughtful young man, too, and sawber by your early rising, which is a hailsome habit—and I wad some a' they inside there had found out the same—dancing a' the night, and snoring a' the morning which God created for man to breathe the freshest of His air, and see the bonniest colours o' His warks. Ye'll be a scholar too, I suppose?"

"A little of one. I am fresh from college."

"Ah—ah—that's well. Ye're doubly welcome, into this land o' barbarians. My Latin's got clean rusted amang them, being denied the godsend o' an hour's rawtional conversation for nine month and mair, not having been able to accept my friend Sir

Digitized by Google

William Hooker's invitation to visit him at Kew, anent the seeds of *Pinus Macoskinianus*, which my aunt's husband's second son—and a vary rising young botanist he is—sent me fra the mountains o' little Thibet. Ye'll ken where little Thibet is, I suppose?"

I bowed, and he went on with his sing-song.

"And this *Pinus Macoskinianus*—being named in honour of your humble servant—is to cut out, I hold, *Douglasii* and a' the darker leaved forms, sir. *Douglasii* can't hold a candle to it for beauty of foliage—ye'll just come up wi' me and judge."

I walked with him, asking him many questions; and found him, under all his conceit and garrulity, a shrewd right-minded man, and respectable in my eyes for this one thing at least—that having one work to do, he did it thoroughly.

Suddenly, at some observation I made about a pool being a bath for Diana's self, he stopped.

"Ah! That minds me. Ye'll have heard of the gardens o' Mæcenas?"

Of course I had.

"An' ye know the book which describes the same?"

I did.

"Then," cried he in rapture, "ye're the lad for me. I've been thinking o' they gardens, ay dreamin' o' them, till I swear I saw them by inspiration; but never could I hear o' the book which described them —mair's the pity. For ye see"—and he waved his

Digitized by Google

hand round—" it's a' pretty enough here, but gothical and barbarical. I'm certain, the more to my sorrow, that it's no convenable to the true rules of classic art. See," he cried, striking out one hand oratorically, " see the situation, the soil, the climate. Nature has done her part. Art and man alone are to blamit. I ha' a' the materials. I ha' a' the science. Gi' me but the classic model, as I've told my lord again and again, an' a poor five hundred pounds, and I'll make his garden the wonder of England and go down to posterity myself as another and a greater Capability Brown."

I was much inclined to laugh: but the tone of his voice showed me that he was too really in earnest to deserve laughter. So I calmed him by telling him that what little classical knowledge I possessed should be always at his service.

One thing he said, which struck me much, and was the parent of much afterthought. I had remarked to him—

" You seem to take as much delight in this garden as if it was your own."

" And why not? When Adam was put into Eden to dress it and keep it, was it the less delightsome to him because in the ultimate he kenned it belonged to Almighty God alone? "

" But surely you are denied the incentive to work which comes from the sense of possession? "

" Oh, that's a carnal superstition, unworthy o' the true artist who rejoices in the wark for its own sake. And what's more, he'd be just a fool if he took the

Digitized by Google

land for his ain; for how would he carry out his wark upon it? It's just the aristocracy which enable him to do it. They are, so to say, the bankers o' the artist and find, at his demand, rough material, capital, a' that he wants except his ain brains. Hoo-oo-o—when I was a bit noisy Radical callant, in a debating society in Glasgow, I'd talk roaring words enough about the cold shade o' the aristocracy. But when I got under it, I found it just a very warm shelter, where I could wark and study, and devote myself purely to my science, wi'out fretting after the daily bread. An' not I only—but see here—I've under me twenty, thirty hands, learning their trade more or less. Whaur would they be but for the aristocracy? What would this garden be but for the aristocracy? A bit turnip-field, putting into the people's pocket thirty shillings an acre per annum for labour. It puts now nearer three hundred pounds. I've three young men under me, rising botanists, that will be fit in seven years to take a place equal to mine. What wad they ha' been doing but for the aristocracy? Earning twelve shillings a week at the plough tail, like brute beasts that have no understanding. And in their old age—see again there—there's a dizen auld hirpling bodies weeding and sweeping, sweeping and weeding, wi' good grey duffle to their backs. Whaur wad they be but for the aristocracy? In the poorhouse. Hoo-oo-o—I suppose ye're a Radical, being fresh fra college. I'll mak' a Tory o' ye, ere ye've been here long."

The good man has not quite succeeded, I am

Digitized by Google

afraid, in making a Tory of me, but he set me thinking, and not in vain.

"And now," he said, "it's half-past seven, and I must gang to our breakfast."

"I wish I was going to mine: but I fear there is no chance of that for some hours to come."

"I'll warrant not till ten o' the day, especially if that skellian William, that waits upon his lordship, was drunk the night."

"He was."

"Ah—a—a! Ye'll no find him o' much use to ye in the praucess o' his lordship's education!"

I shook my head. The canny Scot said no more about the matter: but turning suddenly,

"And if I was not taking too great a liberty with a scholar like yourself, if ye would honour our humble board so far as to partake of a cup of tea?"

I accepted the offer joyfully, and went with him, through endless grasseries and pineries, to a delightful little house—good enough for any person in England—all covered with climbing roses and loniceras. I hardly know which was more pleasant, the flowers outside or the savoury breakfast within.

"What a delightful house, and what a delightful profession!"

"Yes," he said simply and solemnly. "The Lord has cast my lines in pleasant places."

We went indoors and found two intelligent-looking young men, whom he introduced to me as his pupils, a buxom Scotch dame, and three merry children. I never had a pleasanter breakfast in my life.

Digitized by Google

I played with the children, and chatted with the two young men, whom I found sensible and well-educated Scotchmen. One of them, when he learnt I was a Cambridge man, wanted, of course, to engage me in a profound theological discussion. But I escaped, although with loss of honour, by confessing myself utterly ignorant of the merits of certain fine points in the rulings of the Synod of Dort.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V

BREAKFAST over, I hastened back to my charge, and found him still asleep. The sun was high in heaven, and my box of books arrived and was unpacked, before I heard him stir. William had been up, looking sheepish and sulky, without deigning to ask me whether I wanted breakfast. I gave him no orders. I had formed my own plan of action. At last I heard the dear boy stir, and I went in to him instantly.—" Did he want anything? "

" No, he had an abominable headache."

" Then take a seidlitz powder."

" Well, he dared say it would be the best thing."

And he turned over and slept again.

I rang the bell twice, thrice; and after a long interval William reappeared.

" What do you want? " with an emphasis on the you, which was hardly not insolent.

" A seidlitz powder for Lord Hartover."

He did not know where to get any.

" Lord Longmoor has a medical man in the house, I believe? "

" Yes."

" Then go to him, and ask him for one from me."

He had no business with the doctor.

I walked quietly into the boy's room. Luckily the conversation had awakened him.

Digitized by Google

"My lord, is this man to obey me, or not? I wish him to get you a seidlitz powder and he refuses."

I had touched the right chord, but somewhat too sharply; for the boy burst out into a volley of bad words, and ordered the fellow off instantly.

He went. But, as he went, said, loud enough for us to hear—as he intended—"Well, I didn't think his lordship would find it suit his book to quarrel with me."

So the boy was in this man's power.

"Now, my lord, shall I help you to get up? I shall be very happy to act valet, till you get a better one."

"Confound the fellow," muttered he to himself.

Then looked suddenly up at me, and said somewhat fiercely—

"So! I suppose you'll go and tell my father, the first thing, that I was screwed last night?"

"By no means. The offence was not committed under my jurisdiction. I did not begin to take charge of you till this morning."

"So?" in a softened tone. "Then henceforward, I suppose, you intend to keep a pretty tight hand on me!"

I smiled.

"I don't think I could if I tried. But one thing I should like to do."

"What?"

"Teach you how to keep a tight hand on yourself."

Digitized by Google

He laughed, somewhat bitterly, and then hung down his head.

"Here's that fellow with the seidlitz.—Now, William—I shall get up."

As I did not know where his clothes were, I was forced to leave him to William. I could hear them talking away, while I was in the inner room.

Presently he came in, looking as neat as a new pin, and, thanks to the glorious elasticity of youth and health, as handsome as ever. He did not speak; but sat down to breakfast. I was silent also.

"Well?" he said suddenly. "What after breakfast? Lessons, I suppose? William says you've a lot of Latin and Greek books there all ready to begin tormenting me with."

"Your valet cannot possibly know what I intend to do, as the only words I have spoken to him have been to bid him get you a seidlitz powder this morning, and to threaten to kick him downstairs last night."

"You threatened to kick him downstairs?" asked he, highly amused.

"I did"—and I told him why.

"Capital! By Jove, but you're game—he's twice as big as you."

"I know that," said I, laughing; "and I could not have done it; but I am bound to show fight to anyone who tries to lead you, my dear boy, into harm, and, so help me God, I will."

He looked up fixedly at me.

"My dear boy? It's a long time since anyone has

Digitized by Google

called me that." Suddenly he turned scarlet. "I say. Tell me. Is it true? William says that I insulted you last night, and that you were going to be down upon me this morning."

"William is an ill-conditioned fellow for telling you what it was only and solely my business to tell, if it was to be told at all; and for telling lies about my intentions afterwards. I had forgotten all about it, and I hoped you and he had done so, too."

"But tell me—did I say——"

"Never mind what you said, for I shall never mind. Only—don't put yourself again, if you can help it, into a state in which you don't know friends from foes."

"If I can help it!" he cried bitterly. "Humph. Well, I suppose you've heard lots of harm of me already?"

"I have heard nothing of you which I intend to recollect; save what I heard from old Warcop last night, who seems to be a good man and true."

"And that he is! A brick if ever there was one. And what did he tell you?"

"Only this," said I quietly, but determined to go to the root of things at once—"that you had no mother."

He looked at me again fixedly, with a puzzled homeless expression.

"No," he said at last fiercely. "I have no mother, and worse than none. My father is managed by a set of canting Methodists who hate me, and will cheat me out of everything they can, I verily believe,

Digitized by Google

before they're done. And as for Her Magnificence there, as we call her——"

"Stop! you shall tell me nothing."

"But you ought to know, if you're a good fellow —which I see you are, I see already there's neither bite nor kick in you—and you shall——"

"No. You will not tell me the truth."

"What?"

"You will try to, my dear lord, I don't doubt: but you can't help—no man can—mixing up a little of your own feelings with your story. Let me find out the truth for myself, as a quiet looker-on; and if I can be of use I will. God I believe has sent me here; and for you I will work, depend upon me."

He winced at the last words.

"You are not one of those Methodists, are you?"

"Certainly not. Why?"

"Because they are always talking about God, and God sending them. I wish He'd sent them anywhere else."

"Well, you may rest assured that I am no Methodist."

"Then you won't mind my smoking?"

I checked a smile—or a sigh—at the bathos, and went on—"Smoke? Why not!"

And, relieved, he got himself a cigar, and then turned again to me.

"But if you are no Methodist, why do you say God sent you?"

"Because I believe God sends everybody, who is

Digitized by Google

not going about a bad errand. I believe He has sent you."

He looked at me as if he thought me mad.

"Yes—to be a great nobleman, and master of Hover some day, to make hundreds happy and prosperous, and set a fine example to the county and to all England maybe."

He stared into the grate and smoked on. At last—

"You're a strange person. No one ever talked to me in that way before."

"I will talk to you as often as you like, my dear boy. You are not angry with me for calling you dear boy?"

"I?—Odd if I were. I thought no one on earth cared for me except old Warcop and Fé——"

He stopped suddenly and blushed.

Was he going to name Lady Longmoor's maid, the French Mademoiselle? I went forward, however.

"Only—always tell me if I bore you and I will stop. There is no use talking to unwilling ears; and to tell the truth I don't think that your brains are fit for anything very deep to-day."

"Well—no—how close this room is."

He threw away his half-smoked cigar.

"Let us walk out. Where shall we go?"

"Why, to the stables. But do you care for horses?"

"No, because I know nothing about them; but when I do know, I suppose I shall learn to care about

Digitized by Google

them as hundreds of cleverer men than I do. Let us go. At least I shall have a chance of a chat with Mr. Warcop."

"So you made friends with him last night? Ah—he is a brick. Only he is so strict that I am a little afraid of him, and that's the truth."

"I daresay if he was not strict, he could not get his work done."

"I suppose not. And a better servant never lived. I wish I was half as steady as he is."

So we went down, and into the stables, where I was introduced for the first time in my life, into the world of horses. I was astonished at the money and the care which seemed lavished on lines of superb creatures, each of which had its peculiar character, virtues, faults, mode of treatment—to judge at least from the conversation which began between Warcop and Lord Hartover, after the stud-groom had asked, slily enough, "how his lordship's coppers felt this morning."

"Oh," I answered for him, "he was in bed by three, quite early, and a good sleep has made him as lively as a kitten."

"I say," whispered the boy to me presently, "you're a good sort. Does Warcop know I was screwed?"

"Honestly, I believe he does: but never mind——"

"No, hang it, never mind, indeed. It isn't the first time by many a one!—I say, Warcop, that black horse rests his leg still."

Digitized by Google

"An' will rest it, my lord. I've done all I can, but it's never been itself i' the fetlock since Colonel Jack rode him from Enderby Gorse."

"Oh, he'd break down an elephant, if he had a chance. How many horses did he spoil last season, Warcop?"

"Just four, let alone t' harse he drowned at Sawley Bridge ford; but that was any man's luck, and might have been mine or yours."

"By the by, you don't know the Rusher—Colonel Jack Esdaile?"

"No."

"Oh, you must—such a splendid fellow. He's my cousin. In the Life Guards he is, and rides like ten fiends. There's nothing he can't do."

Then, interest even in horse-flesh slackening, thanks to the indiscretion of last night and consequent headache of this morning, he proceeded to change both place and subject of conversation.

"Come along. I'll show you the house if you like."

Of course I liked. And we walked back to the house together.

"There's the new front my great-grandfather built. Some people think it very fine, some say it don't agree with the rest. I'm sure I don't know—or care."

And he yawned.

Agree with the rest it distinctly does not, for it consists of a huge Ionic portico, on the tympanum of which Victory is seen busy crowning the thirteenth

Digitized by Google

Earl of Longmoor for his valour in Marlborough's wars. This suits ill enough with the mass of the house, built in James the First's time; and still worse with the Tudor chapel on the right and the old Norman keep which towers above on a lofty mound. But to my mind such incongruities, in an ancestral mansion as in an old parish church, have a beauty and meaning of their own. They show that each of many generations has loved the place, and added to it as best they could in token of such love; so that, however architecturally faulty, these incongruities have an historic value of unity, of progressive development, and of life.

I said something about all this to Hartover. Said how pleasant it was to think of all his forefathers living here one after another, and leaving their mark upon the place. The idea appeared new to him, and he was interested for a moment.

Yes, his grandfather had made the pleasaunce on the left. He was a clever man, he believed, and fond of pictures and statues. His father—he cared for nothing of that kind, only for his methodistical books.

"But you will find something to care for, and to add to the place."

No. He never should. He hated the place. It was so dull. He should go and live in London and see life. He hated the country, dogs and horses, and farming, and all that sort of thing.

"Why, I thought you seemed very learned in horses?"

Digitized by Google

"Oh, one can't be off knowing about them here. No one talks of anything else." But he detested hunting—getting cold and hungry, and wet, and running the chance of breaking your neck into the bargain. The only excitement he cared for was play—that cost no trouble. "And I'll have plenty of it, I tell you, when I am my own master," he added.

Alas for me! And sadly enough I went with him into the great entrance hall.

"What a glorious ceiling!" I cried, after my eye had wandered over marble pillars and stairs, as I looked up to one of those mythological pageants, in which the genius of Rubens restored to temporary life the grandeur of the dying Venetian School.

Yes—everyone admired it. He cared nothing for it, but there were some pretty enough goddesses among the figures—though rather too stout for his taste.

"Why," I said, "there is a whole Lemprière's Classical Dictionary up there. You might learn as much mythology from it in a day as from books in six months."

He yawned and led me on. But I did not forget my own words, as we went from one splendid room to another. I saw everywhere matter of instruction, from which I longed to teach myself a thousand things. Pictures, statues, curiosities, "objects of bigotry and virtue" as Mrs. Malaprop has it, of every age. To know all that was in that house, I thought, would be to know the whole history of art, and the whole history of England. There were por-

Digitized by Google

traits of gallant men and fair ladies, in every dress from Henry the Seventh's time onwards, many of them personages famous in their day. Armour and weapons hung round the great hall, of every period from the Crusades. At last the boy stopped carelessly before a gold-mounted sword in a glass case, and said—

"That is the sword which Charles the First or Oliver Cromwell—I forget which—gave my ancestor after some great battle or other."

"Ah, Lord Hartover, why do you not learn about all these things?"

"Why, what good on earth would it do me?"

"It would teach you at least," I answered, by some happy inspiration, "who you are."

"What do you mean?"

"Consider how many generations of great men have been heaping together these treasures for you. Surely they were put here to make you wiser, and better in some way. As tokens, in any case, that you owe your ancestors a debt for all they have given you, a debt which you are somehow bound to repay."

"Why, they are all dead and buried, poor old cocks. They had their fun while they lived, and never thought of me. I shall have my fun while I live, and never think of them."

"How do you know that they never thought of you? I daresay they looked forward to the honour and prosperity of their house, ages after they were gone, and perhaps are looking forward to it now."

Digitized by Google

"Now?"

"Yes, how can you tell that your ancestors are not thinking of you now, interested still in the welfare of their family, and expecting you to remember them, to be worthy of them?"

And then, moved by some deep-seated pity, alike for the living and the dead, and by the stately beauty of the place—to me, unaccustomed to great houses, a veritable Arabian Nights palace of delights—I went on to speak to him of the sacredness of family feeling and honest pride of noble blood. I told him how, among the old Greeks and Romans—the only people of whom I really then knew aught—the highest virtues were called forth by the thought, "we must not be less worthy than our forefathers—we must live lives worthy of the trophies won at Marathon and Salamis, worthy of the men who expelled the Tarquins and fought Lars Porsena at the bridge." And, as I myself kindled, while my usual nervous and hesitating manner left me under the influence of excitement, I looked anxiously into his face to see if I had kindled excitement in him likewise.

"Gad!" he said, after standing silent awhile, "how fond you seem of those old Latin and Greek stories."

"Because they teach me so much."

"Hm—Well, I never thought that there was anything in them which had anything to do with me, except to get me floggings."

"I wish that I could get you to read Plutarch's

Digitized by Google

Lives with me. You would find plenty there which has to do with you, and me and every man."

"Are they Latin or Greek?"

"Greek."

He swore at Greek in general, and I dropped the subject.

"I say—are you fond of books?"

"Very."

"Come into the library, they say it is a very fine one."

I went. And at the first glance, I felt, I cannot deny it, foolishly inclined to impugn the justice of Providence which puts such inestimable treasures into the hands of those who have so little notion how to use them. Foolish, indeed, as the next five minutes proved. For, as I rapturously repeated aloud to myself the name of one rare book after another, of which I had only known hitherto by hearsay or quotation, and saw hundreds more, of which I had never even heard but which promised by their titles to be equally precious, the boy asked me, yawning and smiling—

"So you are frightfully gone on books?"

"They are my world. I know nothing but books; yet only few of them."

"Well, you can read all here, you know?"

"Is it possible? And yet, I am afraid, I should soon begin neglecting you for the books."

"Do then! You have my leave." And he laughed. "You sit here and sap, and let me go my own way, and we shall never quarrel."

Digitized by Google

I was about to answer; but he ran on—

"I say, though—here's a capital thought. My father shall make you librarian. The old librarian's dead these two years. He was some old fogy at the British Museum. He never came near the place, and so no one has really looked after the books for years. But you shall be librarian. I'll talk to the Rusher—Colonel Jack, I mean—about it to-day."

"And I am to sit here and mind the books, and leave you to do what you like?"

"I shall do what I like in any case, I can tell you." And he looked as naughty as handsome.

"Then," I said, "my only chance is, to make you like what I like."

He sat down in an easy-chair, threw his legs over the arm, and began whistling, looking fixedly at me. I went on examining the books, with a puzzled head and heavy heart.

"I say, Mr. Brownlow."

"Yes, my lord."

"I think the sooner we come to an understanding the better."

"So do I." And I tried to appear cheerful.

"I suppose you've been told I'm a great blackguard."

"Indeed I have not."

"Then you soon will be. Now listen to me. People may lead me but drive me they cannot. I have been driven all my life, licked and kicked, by masters and boys at school, and tutors at home. Old

Digitized by Google

Dash at Harrow took special pleasure in flogging me, because I was a lord. And the tutor I had at home used to cane me like a dog, because he said I was a vessel of wrath and a child of the devil; and very much a vessel of wrath I showed myself to him when I did turn on him at last. Now I don't think you are going to try that plan."

I smiled, and expressed agreement with his opinion.

"I like you. I liked what you said about my ancestors; and I'll listen to you, if you'll be kind to me —Not that I care a curse," he went on, suddenly bridling up, "for your kindness, or any other man's. I want no man's favours." And he swore again. "But, but"—and he was silent for a while.

"I've often thought, that if I had a friend," he said presently, "anyone I could trust; anyone who would make allowances for me—I have one though —but she can't teach me as you might."

"You want to learn, then?" I took no outward notice of the "she."

"Well. If there was anyone who I thought really wished me well, I'd listen to him and then if he could show me that learning was any use to me——"

"It's not merely learning, Lord Hartover, that will make the man or the nobleman. There is such a thing as self-control wanted."

"I know," he said impatiently, "the old story. Everything that is pleasant is wrong, of course."

"God forbid. But make up your mind what really is pleasant, because it will do to look back

Digitized by Google

upon; and what only makes you miserable next morning."

"Easy preaching! Especially about things a man has not felt himself. This drinking now—I know you are aiming at that—I cannot help it. I crave for it. I never feel well, never myself without it. It's not the mere taste of wine I care for, it is the wine itself I want; and, abuse me as you may, you can't alter plain fact."

I was puzzled. I had not yet learned to analyse such a case. I saw that he believed his own words; but I concluded that he must be mistaken, that idleness and lack of interest had gradually led him into the vice.

"I am not going to try and prevent you drinking wine, if you really need it; but people who get into a habit of intoxication *die*. So I should advise you to stop short of that point. And I do think that if you could find a little occupation and entertainment for your mind you would not crave so much for mere animal excitement."

"What? The crooked letters again, I suppose?"

"I do not ask you to read books. Why not try and learn, as I hinted just now, from all the curious things in these very rooms? Surely it would interest you to know what you were looking at every day; to be able to talk to others rationally about them—to know the history of your own house, of your own family."

"I suppose it would, but how to begin?"

Digitized by Google

"There must be catalogues, descriptions, and so forth in the house."

Yes, he believed there were. The housekeeper knew. She showed the house. Should he ring, and send to ask her?

"By all means." I thought it well to strike while the iron was hot. A footman appeared, had his message; and in due time returned, reporting that Mrs. Caswell was very sorry but it was as much as her place was worth to let her catalogues out of her own hands.

I must do her the justice to say the fellow, as I discovered afterwards, had informed her, that he was "sure the catalogue was wanted for that new tutor chap; for his lordship never cared for such things." Thereupon Mrs. Caswell, considering me as an intruder upon her office, refused with indignation.

The boy swore a little, yawned again, and then asked me if I played billiards.

"No: but I would gladly learn." I was determined, as I could not lead him, to follow him everywhere. For Lord Hartover's beauty, his simplicity beneath that artificial crust of profligacy, had touched my heart no less than the grandeur of his position and the necessity of saving him, for the sake of others as well as himself. I had found my vocation; and would follow it. I would become all things to him. If I failed, I should at least have done my duty.

So I took my first lesson in billiards. The boy

Digitized by Google

knew the game well enough; but played with an uncertain eye and shaky hand. I made no comment, however, but let him instruct me. Ere an hour was out he cried—

"Gad, what a player you'll make! Your hand is as steady as a rock."

"Isn't that an additional reason for drinking water?"

He was much amused when I tried to explain to him, by the light of my little Cambridge knowledge, the science of the game. A few hints about impact and angles took marvellously; and he told his cousin Colonel Jack, "the Rusher"—whose acquaintance I had the honour, or otherwise, of making that afternoon—that "I was a wonderfully clever fellow but—the oddest thing out—I was so jolly with it."

I played with him, I may add, every day after that for months; and, at last could give ten to any man who entered the house.

At two o'clock, luncheon, or rather dinner, was served for us two; and so ended a sufficiently varied, perplexing and, in more than one respect, unsatisfactory morning.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI

LOVE is said to be blind. That may be true of passion—about which I know little. But of such honest and deep affection as, even from the first, I bore my pupil it is, thank God, not true. For, far from shutting my eyes, it opened them, giving me sight and insight. How else could I, unversed in the ways of the world and unused to society, have so soon become aware of the war of conflicting wills and interests surrounding me, of which the dear boy, whom I loved, was at once the cause and the centre?

I had read of court intrigues in history. Now I was to learn that every great house and household, such as Hover, is a court in miniature. Upon the surface are discipline, deference, and ready service, not to speak of adulation and all too ready flattery. Beneath the surface, too frequently, are selfishness and self-seeking, disloyal scheming, even rank treachery. Often have I been tempted to agree with Radical Farmer Braithwaite and condemn great noblemen as a great national evil, rather than with my good friend the Scotch head-gardener, who found in them and their wealth a providentially ordained ladder up which poorer and cleverer men may climb to high places of science and of art.

That afternoon, as I have already said, I made the acquaintance of Colonel Esdaile. No less a per-

Digitized by Google

son than Mr. Marsigli, the grave and courtly Italian butler, brought word her ladyship proposed to visit me—hearing which the boy, who sat smoking in the window, jumped up with an oath and bolted. Why Her Magnificence should trouble herself to seek me, rather than summon me to her presence, passed my comprehension. Such however being her royal will and pleasure, I prepared—though not without inward trepidation—to receive her with the best welcome I might. A sound of voices and laughter preceded her advent, testifying that she did not come unescorted.

If I had thought Lady Longmoor beautiful when looking down upon the ballroom from the gallery last night, I thought her ten times more so on beholding her in the more homely setting of my study. She was very tall, and, though over thirty, still possessed a girlish slenderness of figure. Her features were finely chiselled, her colouring at once vivid and delicate; while the contrast between dark eyes and eyebrows and her magnificent fair hair gave a peculiar character to her face. Her manner struck me as playful and vivacious, though capable of changing, in a moment and at will, to icy hauteur. To this last, it is only just to add, she never treated me even when differences unhappily arose between us. For her ladyship chose to gain her ends rather by the power of her charm than by the authority of her rank.

Her companion, Colonel Jack, enjoyed the reputation, as I learned later, of being both one of the

Digitized by Google

handsomest and one of the best dressed men about town. He might certainly also claim to be one of the largest; though, so excellent were his proportions, that it was only when standing beside him I measured the greatness of his height and bulk. All the same, so my pupil informed me, "the Rusher was as hard as nails and didn't carry an ounce of superfluous flesh." Looking at these two persons, now, I felt abashed; though less by their self-assurance and air of fashion than by their abounding vitality. How many generations, not only of good breeding, but of good food and good drink, must have gone to make them what they were!

Her ladyship was all graciousness. Must shake me by the hand and, sitting down in the nearest chair, put me through a catechism as to my comfort. Had I all I needed? Were the servants attentive? I understood everything was at my disposition. I had but to give my orders, to ask. Colonel Jack meanwhile, standing with his back to the fireplace, one heel resting on the fender, looked on, a quizzical expression upon his face. He wore, I remember, a high-waisted nut-brown riding coat, buff cord breeches and top boots; and held a half-smoked cigar between the first and second fingers of his left hand. Observing his fine devil-may-care manner and superb physique, I could not but fear he must offer a somewhat dangerous contrast to my lady's valetudinarian husband, a *malade imaginaire!* many years her senior, given over to doctors and to snivelling pietists.

Digitized by Google

She began to talk about the boy and his course of study.

"Oh! he ought to learn Latin and Greek—and—French—modern languages you know—ought he not, John? What do you think?"

"Decidedly. Latin, Greek, French, Italian, German, the four rules of arithmetic—geography and the use of the globes—celestial as well as terrestrial—the former should be of special use"—and he laughed, looking my lady meaningly in the face—"Shakespeare, taste and the musical glasses, of course. And you'll be careful, no doubt, to instil principles of youthful piety, and teach the young idea generally how to shoot—you understand all this, of course, sir."

"Perfectly," quoth I, meaning thereby to let the colonel know that I saw he was laughing at me and that I did not intend to be laughed at.

"And—ah—I think instead of beating about the bush, sir, it might be advisable for us to come to a clear understanding."

"I am of that opinion also——"

"Very well, then—*entre nous* his young lordship is a bit of a scamp. And—on the whole—if you can find any method of making him a little less troublesome we shall esteem it—I think I may say so much in your ladyship's name?"

"Good heavens, yes!"

"A kindness on your part. For the rest, as to the general direction of Lord Hartover's studies, we are prepared to defer to your superior judgment."

Digitized by Google

"Oh! yes, certainly"—this from Lady Longmoor. "I am sure we may trust you. Doctor Marston gave us such satisfactory credentials—wrote quite delightfully about you, Mr. Brownlow, in fact——"

I bowed, and smiling she rose to depart. The interview was evidently concluded; but, not choosing to accept the colonel—whatever his relation to affairs—as sole male representative of my pupil's family, I ventured—

"But may I ask—am I not to see Lord Longmoor himself?"

"Oh! dear, yes—no—of course. What do you think, John? He is so much engaged to-day, and is not altogether well I regret to say. We are glad, you know, to spare him any unnecessary exertion."

"And Mr. Halidane, I believe, is reading to him at present; so"—again looking meaningly at her ladyship—"he is possibly better employed than in giving an audience to Mr. Brownlow. No, I think on the whole it might be well to wait a day or two."

"Strange household," I thought, as I closed the door behind them.

Two things struck me. First that Her Magnificence possessed real good-nature—how deep it was I had no time to test; and next that the all-powerful colonel was no fool. The tone in which he addressed me, once I had brought him to book, so different from his natural rollicking free and easy manner, showed he had wit enough to wear a mask. And, laughing at his own mask all the while, though he

Digitized by Google

put it on, as uneducated men of all ranks will, because thinking it proper to do so before scholars or parsons, half expected them to laugh at it too—if they were good fellows. Whether he was likely to be much use to me in dealing with my pupil was another question. However, I apparently had formal *carte blanche* to do what I chose. What could man want more? Much—as I eventually and not unsorrowfully was to discover.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII

MEANWHILE my heart cried out for sight of those same catalogues; and, on the third day, I determined to brave the lioness in her den and go to Mrs. Caswell myself.

So, backed by the boy's commands, William, sneering and scarcely waiting to hold the doors from swinging to on me, showed me down to the great woman. There she sat, in a far more richly furnished room than my father had ever inhabited, a portly and awful personage, in a black satin gown and a huge gold watch and chain, with wine and cake on the table before her.

She rose a very little from her seat with a stiff bow, motioned me to a chair, and inquired to what "she was indebted for the honour of this visit?"—clearly implying that I, not she, was the honoured party.

I answered most blandly, that I had taken the liberty to come and ask her for a little information which only she could give.

To my discomfiture, she broke out immediately to the effect that—"when I had lived longer in houses which belonged to the real nobility, I should be aware that the curiosities they contained were considered as the housekeeper's perquisite. That no one but she had a right to show them, or, indeed, to

Digitized by Google

know anything about them, for what concern were they of anyone but herself?"

In vain I explained, apologised, expostulated. The great woman was obdurate, and I bowed myself out, unsuccessful but bland as I had entered.

That afternoon it rained. I got Lord Hartover to visit the library, between two games of billiards, and from a list—which happily was not in Mrs. Caswell's hands—found out two or three books on ancient armour; and began, to the boy's surprise, making a catalogue for myself of the weapons in the gallery. He laughed at me at first. Then, growing interested, joined me after a while in verifying swords and helmets; and, when we came to a real Crusader's helmet, allowed me to tell him something about the Crusades, and began to speculate which of his ancestors had worn that rusty pot under a Syrian sun. Finally, his pride being aroused, he got at his pedigree, a copy of which was kept in the library—the original was stored away in a mysterious muniment-room—and we settled which earl the Crusader must have been; and so, pleasantly enough, kept clear of French novels and other questionable entertainments for the remainder of the afternoon.

From that day I began to have hopes. The armour occupied us for full six weeks, and gave us a good deal of collateral history to work up. I, of course, did the work, and told him as much thereof as I thought would interest him, and began to look forward to the time when I should teach him a little

Digitized by Google

live ancient history from the statues and pictures. But ere the six weeks were out, my new method of education received more than one startling check.

That very evening, for example, about eight o'clock he threw aside his books, said that he must go to the drawing-room, and disappeared; to reappear at long past midnight a good deal the worse for wine. I put him to bed without reproof, and went to my own room, feeling, with Parson Evans, "a great disposition to cry."

"Well," said he, next morning, "so I was screwed again last night?"

I shook my head sadly enough.

"I really am sorry I was, if it gives you any pain."

"My dear lord, what else can it do?"

I let the matter drop for the time; got him after breakfast into the gallery, and kept him amused for two or three hours. While we were there a note came from the earl—not however in his handwriting—to the effect that he could not see me that day, but hoped to do so shortly. Seemingly, I was to be left on all sides to my own mother-wit.

After the early dinner, the boy announced he should go out riding. I could say nothing against it; so walked down to the stables, and saw him ride off, in a bright blue coat, white breeches and top-boots, looking very handsome, with a groom behind him.

Old Warcop stood watching him by my side. I turned to him for information and comfort. He

Digitized by Google

really seemed the only rational person, save the Scotch gardener, in the establishment.

"Is he fond of riding?"

Warcop shrugged his shoulders.

"I'd thought I'd ha' made a bonny horseman o' him once: but o' late he's no nerve—darna face a hurdle, worse luck. He'll canter along the road for an hour on a park hack that's no better than an easy chair to sit on; but for hunting—I sorely doubt he'll ever mak' a man."

"Never make a man?"

"He's knocking himself to pieces ere he's grown, and that's truth. And I say it to ye, for ye'll soon see it yourself. He was up late last night again, I guess."

"And where does he spend his evenings?"

"In t' servants' hall. Ye see, as soon as the other folks are happed up, out goes the fiddle there and they dance till their shanks ache, most nights, and she wi' them; and after that there's few o' t' lads turn in sober. God help us!"

"But does his lordship know?"

"And what signifies what he kens? Mony's the night she'll come down hersel' when she's nought better to do, and the colonel wi' her, and dance among 'em all as gay as the gayest."

"She? Mademoiselle?"

"Na, lad, her ladyship's sel'."

What was to be said?

"Is he fond of shooting?" I asked, wishing to turn the conversation.

Digitized by Google

"Na—na nerve for that either. I tell ye, he's fond o' naething fit for a man. I can't tell what's come over him, these last three years. It's my opinion he cares for naught but those lasses in the workroom, where he sits with Mamzell every afternoon, and makes petticoats for aught I know."

"Makes petticoats?"

"An' what else should he do, amang the needles and thimbles?"

But there was something in Warcop's eye which told me what he had no mind to speak.

I fell into a reverie. How was I to win the boy? By identifying myself entirely with his pleasures and pursuits? But how, while they were such as these? At least I must do what I could. Oh! that I could never let him out of my sight! That was impossible. Still I must do what I could. A thought struck me. If I rode with him, I might persuade him to spend a longer time in the open air. Keep him away from the afternoon amusement with the maids; perhaps bring him home healthily tired, to go to bed at a reasonable hour. But then, I could not ride. And should I be allowed to ride?

I told Warcop all this on the spot. He received it graciously, setting his head on one side like a terrier dog, as he always did when a new thought struck him—

"As for harses—dinnot fash yourself! T' harses are mine, and I'll see ye ha' one daily. But then—ye say ye cannot ride."

"I never was upon a horse in my life."

Digitized by Google

enough—I wish you'd ride with me of a day. It is so abominably stupid dawdling about alone. That's why I came back."

Needless to say I jumped at the proposal; and, very soon, to make a long story short, I was riding with him regularly daily.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII

OH! the delight of those rides! The new sense of power and freedom, of being able to go whither I chose, and what pace I chose; the exhilarating motion, the exhilarating air, the clearness of brain and the sharpness of appetite such as I had never felt before in my life. My lungs seemed, henceforward, to inspire fuller breath; my blood to course more lively through my veins; while that ancient foe, my liver, disappeared from among my sensations, and with it those fearful headaches which it inflicted on me once a month. Under the magic influence of those rides, I began to take a cheerfuller view of myself, the dear boy, and of all earth and heaven.

But it was for his sake, even more than for my own, that I delighted in them. For now I began to spend a large part of my long lonely evenings in learning the geography, history, antiquities of the surrounding country, which I retailed to my pupil when we were out. We rode to old castles and manor-houses; and I told him the story of the families to which they belonged. Along river banks, whose course I pointed out to him. Past old Roman camps and Druid pillars, on which I lectured with such small knowledge as I had, and was well rewarded by his assuring me that, though he used to

Digitized by Google

hate his rides as a necessary bore, they were now the pleasantest part of the day.

But greater was my delight when I found, as his bitterness and nonchalance vanished before exercise and amusement, that I had to deal with a mind of no common order. Quick-witted, argumentative, fanciful, and gifted; and, when growing interested he forgot his slang, with that exquisite grace of expression, which so many men and women afterwards admired—perhaps too much. I took heart and hope as I found I was setting my labour on no barren soil.

I could not help having—as young men will and should have—my ambitions, my hope of such success as was possible to a crippled student, without worldly position or worldly wealth. And now, was I not granted unlooked-for opportunity of success? For, his intelligence proving so considerable, the dream came over me that I might train my pupil to be a great statesman, one whose name might figure among those of famous political leaders, the men who carry forward and consolidate the glory of English history.

True, I knew too well the battle with weakness was not won yet. That common self-restraint, common industry, perhaps common principle even, had yet to be taught. I knew, too, the fertile soil when once stirred would grow weeds as well as wheat. Still it was fertile. I had not to deal with that most hopeless of creatures, a dullard and a dunce.

But dearer to my heart than any dream of training him as a statesman, was that of training him to

Digitized by Google

be a worthy heir to, and, in God's good time, worthy owner of this noble place. I don't think I troubled about reward. The honour of the thing was enough in itself. For the beauty of Hover had rapt me; and it seemed to me in training the boy to govern it well, I should identify myself with its life and his life, thus making both him and it, in a sense, my own.

When I walked about the place, on which depended not merely the employment, but the civilisation and morality of hundreds, still more, when I rode the country-side for miles, north, south, and east, and west, and, on inquiry whose was the farm, whose the colliery, the parish, the township, received for answer—as if Puss in Boots had been there before me—that it belonged to the Earl of Longmoor, otherwise my lord Marquis of Carabas —and when I saw, too, the neglected fields and homesteads, the villages reeking with filth, the villagers degraded by poverty—when I saw the collieries, hideous sight! with their groups of half-naked girls, who seemed to have cast off all shame and womanhood, and of men, whose souls seemed as dark and foul as their bodies, their clusters of wretched cottages, far from church and school, upon some bleak moorside—when I saw those bleak moors themselves, capable, as Braithwaite had assured me, of growing rich crops, and contrasted them with the estates of Lord Yarborough (let his name be honoured!) in my native Lincolnshire, my heart burned within me, and I felt it a sacred duty to enlighten

Digitized by Google

the boy regarding his tremendous obligation to the land and the dwellers upon it, to awaken not only his interest, but some instinct of service, remembering that of those to whom much has been given much also is, very surely, required.

Soon the opportunity came.

We had ridden out some three miles in a direction we had never taken before, when we passed, by bridle gates, through a large farm which offered a strikingly different aspect to that of all around.

The fields were full fifty acres each, and planted—it was the month of July—with every kind of crop, including some roots which were new to my eye, neatly drilled in rows. Not a weed was to be seen far or wide. Deep open cuttings, seemingly lately made, were carrying off the water after last night's thunderstorm. The sheep and cattle were of a different and larger breed than those of the neighbourhood. All bore marks of recent improvement, followed up by detailed industry, and, a sight strange in England then, over the large neat farm-buildings smoked the tall chimney of an engine-house.

"What a splendid farm!" quoth I. "Whose is this?"

Hartover did not know. The groom on being asked said it was called Mere Ban—"Braithwaite's place."

"Oh! that revolutionary rascal?"

"He has made a revolution here," said I.

"He has, sir," put in the groom. "Seven years agone this land would not carry a horse for nine

Digitized by Google

months in the year, most of it. All moor it was and deep moss."

And the groom trotted on to open the next gate.

"Ah," said I, "why should not the whole estate be like this?"

"Why should it?"

The simplicity of the question shocked and puzzled me.

"Because—because"—I looked about for an answer—"your rent-roll would be doubled."

"There is money enough in the family, I believe, already."

"And so much more food would be grown, and so much more employment given."

"I suppose so."

"And—your duty towards your country and your king would be better done."

"Humph. And pray what may that be, Mr. Philosopher?"

"To make England richer and stronger year by year."

"You are always bothering about duty, old Philosopher."

"It is God Who troubles people with their duty, Lord Hartover, and sometimes troubles them still more if they do not do it."

"Well," he said, "what can I do? I am not in possession, you will be pleased to recollect; and if my father is an old"—he checked himself—"that is not my fault, is it?"

"No," I hastened to reply—"and we are here

Digitized by Google

not to pass judgment upon the actions and conduct of others, but only upon our own."

Then I tried to put to him something of the obligations, as well as the privileges, which inheritance of a great name and property carry with them, recalling much that Mr. Braithwaite had said to me on that memorable drive, and using the excellent working of his farm and the words *noblesse oblige* as my text. The subject fired me, and I think I made my exposition and appeal not without a certain eloquence. The boy listened patiently and sweet-temperedly enough, though how far I raised an answering flame in him I could not then judge. That he should listen at all was so much to the good.

We had been walking the horses. Now, turning into a green lane shaded by an avenue of hedgerow elms, he put his horse to a trot; and, with a saucy, half-laughing lift of the head, said to me over his shoulder—

"Why not tell all this to the Rusher, instead of to me?"

"What has Colonel Esdaile to do with it?" I asked surprised, ranging my horse alongside his.

"Why, he stands next in the succession, don't you know that, my stepmother having no children. And though he is twice as old as I am, he has three times as good a constitution as mine. Don't go and say that probably at my age he took better care of his health. He racketted freely enough. But if you are built like a bull, and can carry as much liquor as would put half a dozen ordinary men under the

Digitized by Google

table, with a steady head, you can afford to racket."

The boy's cynical tone distressed me, while the fact he stated gave me cause for thought. I had not known Colonel Esdaile was next heir to the title and estate. It complicated the position; and, though I tried not to speculate on that point, put a different complexion upon his friendship with her ladyship. Did the boy speak at random only to tease me, or did he measure the significance of what he had just said?

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX

In so large a house as Hover, it is possible for people to dwell for a long time under its roof without meeting, unless some common interest or occupation draws them together. Fully three weeks passed before I made acquaintance with Lord Longmoor's resident physician of the body; and the better part of three months before I held intercourse with his resident physician of the soul.

The latter gentleman, I own, I felt no particular craving to meet. He might be a highly respectable and pious person; but, from hints dropped by Warcop, and even by Hartover himself, I had reason to guess the influence he exercised over Lord Longmoor was antagonistic to my pupil, whose misdemeanours he was prone to magnify rather than excuse. Nor were my fears under this head allayed by our interview. It took place on the first day of grouse-shooting, when Hartover had gone to the moors with Colonel Esdaile and some gentlemen staying in the house.

Mr. Halidane, a rosy-faced, sleek-haired, stout young man of about thirty, entered the room smiling, shook me warmly by the hand—his own was white, plump and somewhat squashy—and inquired briskly—

Digitized by Google

"Mr. Brownlow, my dear sir, and how's your soul?"

I understood the meaning of the phrase, having experienced similar little impertinences from College friends. The Evangelical movement at Cambridge was then in the flush of youthful extravagance, affecting, for good or evil, all sorts of characters in all sorts of different ways. Like the High Church party at Oxford, thirty years later—perhaps like every outbreak of fanaticism—it had its ascetic party, its mystical party, its formalist party; its dilettante and altogether insincere adherents—often the most active and noisy of all—hanging about the nucleus of really convinced and virtuous men like the nebulous tail round a comet. Attracted towards the movement by conceit or curiosity, and soon bound to it by interest and party spirit, they adopted little of its doctrine save a contempt for the uninitiated, and little of its practice save a few catch-words and fantastic phrases. While—since young men are prone to caricature their teachers—both contempt and catch-words were somewhat ostentatiously thrust in the faces of those who, like myself, belonged rather to the rational, and, as it was called, High and Dry School.

From my own excellent Master, Dr. Marston, as well as from the wise and learned divine—afterwards Bishop of Peterborough—whose theological lectures I attended, I had learnt that neither doctrine nor practice was to be based upon the shifting sand-bank of inward frames and feelings; but on the solid

Digitized by Google

to see in all who will not support them and their clique the "enemies of God," whom they are justified in "hating right sore" even as though they were their private foes.

But enmity, though inspired then, did not show itself till later. Halidane was shrewd enough to keep the peace while he had an object to gain; and he went on to extol Lord Longmoor's piety and virtues in terms so grossly fulsome that I had much ado to avoid some counter-observations, which might have been carried straight to his lordship as a charge against me.

It may seem that I began to distrust the man too soon; but there are instinctive repulsions and antipathies against which it is vain to fight, and instinct told, or seemed to tell me, that however sincere his religious convictions, Halidane was not in some respects honest. I did not believe him, nor do I now, to have been consciously and deliberately false: but I had seen how fanaticism can demoralise. I had seen, too, how the braggart, whether he brag of earthly or of heavenly matters, is perpetually tempted to say and do anything which will further his own self-glorification. Therefore I was wary, and contented myself by remarking, that I was delighted to hear Lord Longmoor was so estimable; that I considered myself most fortunate in becoming a member of his household; and that I hoped that I should some day have the privilege of observing, in person, the excellences of which he spoke.

Digitized by Google

And at those words I observed a sudden shyness and restraint come over my new acquaintance.

Yes—he hoped so. He trusted so. But his lordship's health was so very weak; and he was so deeply occupied with the great work which he was preparing for the press, that—" in short, you must be aware, my dear sir, these exalted personages, from the immense gulf which exists between them and us, are not to be expected to see much of—you understand me? As for myself, a humble servant of the good cause, if I am admitted somewhat often to his presence it is only in my religious capacity, as a helpmate —a secretary—a transcriber of his thoughts. In fact," said he, with a giggle, " as a sort of spiritual valet."

I nearly did more than giggle at this ingenuous confession of the truth; but contented myself with assuring him that I had neither hope nor wish to aspire to the friendship of so great a person. All I desired was to receive his commands as to the course to be pursued with his son.

At mention of the boy, Mr. Halidane began to groan; and to groan still louder, when I informed him that I found the lad most intelligent, sweet-natured, open to all good impulses.

He caught at one word—nature.

" Nature? Filthy rags, a cage of unclean birds, sweet though they seem. Grace, my dear sir, grace is what is needed, and what, I fear, is not there."

" On the contrary," I said, getting a little naughty,

Digitized by Google

"I think Lord Hartover one of the most graceful persons I ever saw."

He looked at me, puzzled, as I intended he should be—

"Graceful? It is a very different grace of which I speak."

And he went on with certain theological propositions, on the whole very true, though not stated in the most wise or merciful fashion.

"And it is my very painful duty to tell you, I hear that, instead of bringing the poor boy to a sense of his awful danger, you have been amusing his perishing soul, and wasting precious moments, by carnal instruction in the merest vanities—books—armour—antiquities, and such things."

"Has Lord Longmoor any objection to my doing so?" I asked very simply.

"His lordship has but one anxiety about his son—his immortal soul—a sense of his situation."

"Then will you be so kind as to tell his lordship that I have been doing my utmost, ever since I entered the house, to bring his son to that very sense of his situation."

"So you think his soul in a very awful state?"

This was said as eagerly as if the questioner hoped for an affirmative. I suspected a trap, and began to look still more narrowly at my man.

"My opinion is worth little, my dear sir. We all, I suppose, know what Lord Hartover has been. Pray tell his lordship that I shall do my very best

Digitized by Google

to bring about an utter change; and that I see already the most hopeful signs of it."

"You trust in the arm of the flesh, sir! In the arm of the flesh! God alone can change his heart, and you arrogate to yourself the power of God. It is blasphemy, sir, and Pelagianism. Good-bye, and Heaven send you a better mind!"

And he went out quite angry, leaving me to ponder over the strange contradictions of a system which, while asserting that all goodness is the gift of Heaven, condemns men to everlasting misery because they fail to have that which has not been given them.

I was seriously vexed however at Mr. Halidane leaving me thus in anger. I had no wish to make enemies, particularly of one who had my lord's ear. I blamed myself for my want of tact and caution: though, the more I looked into my words, the less I found for which to take myself to task. I had still to learn how unprofitable it is to deal with a fanatic, shut up within the four corners of his own system. When reason and humanity have both been abjured as carnal, common sense cannot evoke common sense, or a soft answer turn away wrath. So with a heavy heart, I awaited the boy's return from shooting.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X

I WAS not nervous or given to fancies; but I cannot deny, as I waited for my pupil that evening, anxiety and depression grew upon me. On one excuse or another he had been away from me often lately. It was not easy to take a middle course between allowing him a dangerous measure of liberty and holding him with too tight a rein. I felt or imagined—more than probably the latter, as I told myself—alien influences were working against my control of him. Who was the plotter? I could not say. But, for the past week or ten days, he had certainly been less sweet-tempered, less industrious, less open to suggestions of duty. I thought I detected a craving for novelty and for excitement. Perhaps the long day's sport, in the glorious air of the moors, would allay that craving, amuse him and send him home honestly tired to bed.

Nine o'clock struck.—Ten.—A scuffle on the stairs outside, and, supported by William, he burst in, heated, quarrelsome, noisy, in plain English more than half-drunk.

I was cut to the quick. For so long there had been no lapse of this kind. For the moment I was weak, losing faith and hope. Was this to be the end of my ambitions, my dreams for him and for Hover? Was my Prince Charming—and more than merely Prince

Digitized by Google

Charming—to sink into a miserable and useless sot?

That which followed was painful. Why dwell on it? To describe such things profits neither reader or writer. Best let them be hid. With the help of William—over whom I had acquired a certain ascendency, and who, though ignorant and servile, was not a bad fellow at bottom—I got the boy to bed.

Next morning he sulked, too sick to eat, and also too ashamed, I believe, to risk an explanation. His head ached—he couldn't be bothered to talk. No—he hated billiards. He didn't want to ride—it was so wet and beastly out. After luncheon he announced defiantly that he was going to see Mademoiselle Fédore in the workroom. He wanted to speak to her about something. When I put in a gentle remonstrance he broke out, with an oath—"Why not? She'd been very kind to him in the past. What would he have done but for her, before I came, when he was so lonely? He believed I suspected her of evil designs. I was not fair to her."—And so forth and so on—a perverted and truculent chivalry awakened in him. He was glad, moreover, I think, to find any outside cause of anger wherewith to blow off the steam of his shame and anger against himself.

Short of force—which under the circumstances was impracticable—I could not prevent his going to the workroom. And, still defiant, he went.

After a while I betook myself to the stables, sadly enough, determined to take counsel of Warcop, who,

Digitized by Google

at times, seemed to me the one really sane man in the establishment.

There was no need to state my errand. After looking round warily, to make sure no eavesdroppers were present, he began without further preamble—

"So a' the fat's i' the fire again, sir, worse luck."

"How did you hear that, Warcop?"

"Everybody on the place has heard it by now. Mr. Marsigli let Lord Hartover in last night and ca'd William to him. And what Mr. Marsigli kens, Mamzell kens."

"Why?"

"The twa furriners hang together—French Mamzell and Italian maccaroni—how should they not?"

He looked at me with a twinkle of humorous contempt.

"And what Mamzell kens, her ladyship kens—for the main part. And what she kens, Mr. Halidane kens—an' she pleases. And what he kens goes on to my lord, dished up, I promise you, wi' all manner o' slavering sickly-sweet sauce, to tickle his swallow just as Mr. Halidane wants it tickled—that is to my young lord's disrepute and disgrace."

Warcop must have been deeply moved to lay aside his Yorkshire caution thus, and express himself so freely even to me. I was shocked, though not wholly surprised. It was an ugly chain; but one link was still missing, so I thought. I asked him—

"And what about Colonel Esdaile in all this?"

Warcop shook his head.

"I canna tell ye," he said slowly. "I do not ken

Digitized by Google

myself. By times I seem to hold the truth of it a' by the tail, and then again it slips fra between my fingers. Never have I gripped it fairly round the belly yet. I doubt if the colonel has ever gripped it fairly any more than me. A man may be pulled twa ways too hard to ken which way he wants to travel most."

And he was silent. Evidently he spoke in good faith, and had said his last word on that point. But there was something further I had to ask. I told him so, adding—

"I have not a soul I can depend on, Warcop, except you. I know your first object is the dear boy's well-being."

"'Deed," he interrupted, "an' you're right. I've been in t' stables here ever syne I was ten years auld, ever syne I cam' wi' my father out of bonny Craven. And I've had but twa things to fill my heart for mony a year, and that is t' harses and t' lad. T' harses canna be mended, though I say it; for I've had the breeding of them and t' making of them. T' lad can; for I've had na t' breeding o' him; and I've no had the making of him neither, nebbut his riding, which he needna be ashamed on nor I either,—so ye must do t' mending, sir. Ye've begun well and ye mustna be disheartened and go back on your work, though the odds are against you. I don't say they're not. But hold on, sir, hold on. Don't turn back at this check, and you'll bring him through at last, and God bless you for it"—he raised his hat reverently—"bless you and your work."

Digitized by Google

Hover for a time to pay a round of visits—while his lordship, Mr. Halidane, his doctor and three men-servants in attendance, moved to Bath, as was his wont in the autumn, to drink the waters and confer regarding spiritual matters, as I understood, with certain " saints indeed " there resident.

Lady Longmoor had taken Mademoiselle Fédore along with her—for which I gave God thanks.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI

HERE I must go back in my story, to pick up threads which were to work into the pattern not only of my life, but of the dear boy's likewise, with lasting results.

Having found where Mr. Braithwaite lived, I did not neglect the invitation he so kindly gave me on the night of my arrival at Hover. Indeed, thenceforth, my walks to Mere Ban, and the conversations I had with him at the pleasant stone-built house—facing south, overlooking an orchard and flower garden; barns, farm and rick-yards, ranges of stables, cow-sheds and outbuildings, including the engine-house with its tall chimney, to right and left, the whole backed by a high distance of moor and fell—came to be among the greatest pleasures of such hours as I could claim from my regular duties—a dangerous pleasure, perhaps, with heartache, nearly heart-break behind it. But these were to come later; and even with them, God knows, I have no quarrel now.

I found Mr. Braithwaite a man of advanced views, but of sound and temperate judgment, whose opinions commanded my respect even when I could not fully endorse them. I learnt much from him of interest and value about the manufacturing and agricultural classes, about the conditions of labour—too often a crying disgrace to our vaunted civilisa-

Digitized by Google

tion, let alone our Christianity—and about the life of the poor, who, he asserted, owing to the abuses of our social and economic system, "had got but a very little way from the serf and savage even yet." As I have already mentioned, he strongly supported the new Poor Law, then being agitated, to which he looked to lift the blighting stigma of pauperism from off our peasant population. He was also, I found, an ardent advocate of national education; and, in practical politics, hopefully forecasted many of the provisions of the Reform Bill, carried a couple of years later by Lord John Russell in the teeth of Tory opposition. His contention, I observed, always came back to the old and incontrovertible, if in some directions unwelcome, definition, that the good of the governed is the end, the *raison d'être,* of government.

By degrees, notwithstanding the reserve native to his character, he told me something of his private life. After the loss of his wife and only son, a boy of ten, during an epidemic of fever, he had sold his business in Leeds and removed to the country for the sake of the health of his remaining child, a daughter. As to the latter his object was certainly attained, for a young girl more nobly endowed, both in mind and body, than Nellie Braithwaite—then in her nineteenth year—I have never seen or wished to see. The broad, full brow surmounted by its crown of dark hair, telling of intellect and imagination; the flush of the cheek under the quickening of sympathy or emotion; above all the glorious eyes,

Digitized by Google

steadfast and fearless, serious with thought or bewitching with laughter, made a picture that might well have inspired the genius of a Reynolds or a Lawrence.

From the time of his wife's death, Mr. Braithwaite's half-sister Miss Ann, a quiet, sweet-faced spinster, had lived under his roof and devoted herself to the care of his daughter. But Nellie, although still so young, was both mistress of her father's house and his constant companion, showing, even then, the ready and delicate tact which later stood her in such good stead under very different circumstances. In regard to her education Mr. Braithwaite had followed a system of his own, with which —though far from academic—I could find no fault, since the results appeared so excellent. Talking to me one day, when we were alone, upon this subject he pointed to a shelf of, what he called, his daughter's "text-books"—an edition of Shakespeare in many volumes, unexpurgated, Hume's History of England, the Waverley Novels, then at the height of their vast popularity, Miss Edgeworth's Tales, an old copy of Florio's Montaigne, Percy's Reliques, and the Lyrical Ballads of Wordsworth and Coleridge—strong meat, so it struck me, for a young girl's palate.

As to this I said nothing, however, willing to believe my friend must know his own business best. But, when I commented, perhaps foolishly, upon the large proportion of fiction, he turned on me sharply—

Digitized by Google

"And why not? Good fiction—I rule sensationalism and amatory green-sickness out, of course—is a very good handbook to human nature; and among a woman's first duties, in my opinion, is the study of human nature. Why? For her own happiness' sake, my dear sir; and for the sake of the family and household to which she belongs in childhood; and of that other family and household of which she will be the centre and guardian angel later—if she marries and bears children, as every healthy woman should."

Then, his daughter entering the room, he turned the conversation.

"Fiction, indeed—and again, why not? Ah! there crops up the besetting sin of you scholars—jealousy for the past as against the present; worship of all and any learning, save learning about men and things here, under your hand; stiff-necked disbelief that the live dog, if not better, at least has the chance of being as good as any dead lion—that you and I walking the English country-side here to-day, in short, are every bit as valuable in God's sight as any Greek walking the streets of Athens in the age of Pericles."

I laughed, promising to lay the rebuke to heart; while assuring him that, though there might have been some need of it in my Cambridge days, the need grew less and less since my coming to Hover—a premature assertion, as the sequel was to prove.

"That is good hearing," he said. "You might do worse, believe me, than take Warcop, bandy-legged old centaur that he is, for your instructor in

Digitized by Google

—well—a number of by no means unimportant matters."

And that was as near as we ever got to discussion of my pupil and his concerns. For Mr. Braithwaite was studious to avoid asking questions, studious, indeed, to avoid all semblance of curiosity. Of this I was glad, as it relieved our intercourse from a carefulness and restraint which would otherwise have been incumbent upon me. And at Mere Ban I was glad to forget Hover—though, as I trust, without any disloyalty to the latter. More and more the big farm-house came to hold a charm for me, the like of which I had never felt before. Exactly in what that charm consisted I did not stop to ask myself. I was, as I see now looking back at it all, a very great simpleton. I ought to have guessed, ought to have known, what was happening to me. But I did not know. I blundered on like a man but half awake. Blundered, till I ran my stupid head against a wall, thereby giving myself a blow, the scar of which smarts at times even yet—but very gently, now, almost gratefully. I should even be grieved, I think, if it gave up smarting altogether. Of this more hereafter.

During the short winter afternoons my visits to Mr. Braithwaite were necessarily less frequent. Moreover, from merely riding out with Hartover, I went on to hunting at least one, often two days a week with him. I began chiefly on his account, believing that hunting would help to steady his nerves and keep him out of mischief generally. Having

Digitized by Google

once begun, I own the passion of that manly and honest sport grew on me. Let alone the pleasure and health of it, it brought me into contact with the neighbouring gentry and farmers, thereby breaking down my natural shyness and giving me greater ease and assurance of manner. In this it was useful to the dear boy, as well as to myself, since it made me better fitted to be his associate and companion in society.

The last meet of the season, a warm March day, when coppice and woodland were already breaking into leaf. We found and lost, found and lost again till late afternoon. The scent was light, burnt up by the sun. The horses a bit faint—the going in the lowland heavy, after nearly a week of rain. The hounds had trotted on home. Hartover and I rode back together slowly, taking our way down the green lane which crossed an outlying portion of Mr. Braithwaite's farm. The heads of the hedgerow elms showed rose-red in the level sunshine, and a soft westerly wind blew in our faces.

Hartover took off his hat and rode bareheaded. He was just wholesomely tired, his humour sweet and fanciful. His air at once gallant and wistful, in his mud-splashed pink, with that effect of slight fatigue chastening his beauty—verily, a lovable young creature in very perfect harmony, so it seemed to me, with the fair, if somewhat wayward, promise of the spring.

Where the lane makes an elbow, we came suddenly upon a little flock of sheep—some score of ewes

Digitized by Google

with their lambs beside them, broad, deep-fleeced, dirty-drab, slow-moving backs flanked by small, tight-curled, rusty-white, pushing and jostling backs—the whole advancing in a solid mass which filled the lane from bank to bank. They were heading away from us towards a five-barred gate that opened, where the lane made a second elbow, on to a steep upward sloping pasture broken here and there by an outcrop of lavender-grey limestone rock.

In the tall, heavily-built man, clothed in coat, breeches and gaiters of pepper-and-salt mixture, who walked behind the flock, a couple of collie dogs at his heels, I recognised Mr. Braithwaite. And in the girl, standing just within the pasture and holding wide the gate, his daughter, Nellie herself. She wore a brown dress, and her straw hat was tied down gipsy-fashion with a wide blue ribbon passed across the crown of it and knotted beneath her chin.

"Steady," Hartover said, checking his horse. "Don't let's hustle those jolly little beggars"—meaning the lambs—"or they'll scatter."

Then added, half under his breath—"Gad, but what a pretty picture it all makes! Who's the lovely shepherdess, I wonder?"

I told him and gravely, for something in his tone jarred on me.

"What a pity!"

"Why?"

"Oh! I don't know." He gave a naughty little laugh. "Because she belongs to that villainous old Radical, I suppose, who'd like nothing better than to

Digitized by Google

pull Hover down about my ears, confound him, if he only got the chance. But I forgot. He's a friend of yours, sir, isn't he? I beg your pardon."

The last words were spoken with engaging frankness of apology.

Just then, at a sign from their master, the two collies sprang forward rounding up the startled flock. Once through the gateway the sheep and lambs spread out, over the green pasture, into a great fan and began cropping the sweet short grass; while Nellie Braithwaite, closing the gate behind them, stood waiting for her father to join her and for us riders to pass.

Wanting, as I took it, to make amends to me for his little incivility, Hartover greeted Mr. Braithwaite courteously enough. And, while I stopped to talk with the latter a moment, rode forward and spoke to Nellie, hat in hand, a flush as of shyness on his face. I only heard indistinctly what he said—commonplaces about the weather, the spring evening, the browsing sheep. The girl stood looking up at him, least embarrassed of the two, as it struck me, fearless, serious, her eyes full of thought.

What did she make of the beautiful boy sitting the noble horse, in the soft westerly wind and sunshine, amid singing of birds and bleating of sheep? She could have heard little good of him, alas!—a young rapscallion, reprobate and aristocrat, given to all manner of wild doings, rows, cards, drinking bouts. Did she judge him harshly out of her own fine purity and rectitude? My feeling, just then, was more for

Digitized by Google

the boy than for her. I am glad to remember that. My instinct was to plead for and excuse him, to protect him from condemnation on her part.

I joined him. We rode on. Once he turned in the saddle and looked back. Then he fell silent; and in silence we reached the great gates, and rode through the Chase, home to royal Hover piled like a mountain against the sunset.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII

DURING this time the library and its many treasures had not been forgotten. By degrees I rearranged and catalogued the bulk of its contents—a labour of love if ever there was one, though attended by unexpected material benefit to myself. For the ruling powers at Hover, namely her ladyship and Colonel Esdaile, had duly conferred the post of librarian upon me, with extra salary to the amount of seventy-five pounds a year. The appointment—made, by the way, during Lord Longmoor's protracted sojourn amid the "Saints indeed" and medicinal fountains of Bath—was accompanied by so many gracious speeches as to the esteem in which she and the colonel held me, and the value they set on my poor services, that I could not but feel both elated and touched.

"No—no thanks. The idea came from George" —Lord Hartover—"to begin with. And it was such a pleasure to be able to do something he asked. His requests"—with a meaning smile—"as I knew, had not always been very easy to grant. And it was such a comfort to feel now the poor dear books would be properly cared for at last. The original lists and catalogues? Yes, of course, good Mrs. Caswell should be made to disgorge them."

Which she did, after many delays and with a mighty bad grace.

"I ought to have had them from the first; but one

Digitized by Google

knew how jealous old servants were of their privileges.—Should I write and thank Lord Longmoor? It was so nice of me to think of that, but really it wasn't necessary—was it, Jack? Things of this sort his lordship was glad to leave to her and Colonel Esdaile. He hated detail—was unequal to attending to business; and their great object was to spare him all possible fatigue and worry. Yes—his wretched health was most distressing, a terrible trial to her, of course."

And she drew down the corners of her laughing mouth, drooped her eyelids with their wonderful black lashes, sighed, raising her charming shoulders, and pensively shaking her fair head—recovered her habitual good spirits, talked on for a minute or so, fluent, dazzling, and—dare I say it?—illiterate; and swept out, as she had swept in, a brilliant vision, Colonel Jack as usual hanging on her skirts.

What did it all mean? Unwillingly I asked myself that, a twinge of distrust taking me. To ascribe her kindness, and the interest she displayed in me, exclusively to my own merits savoured too much of conceit. What could an obscure, lame scholar, such as I, matter to the great lady, unless she had some private and personal end in view? Reluctantly I recalled to mind my dear old Master's warning before I left Cambridge; and, later, Mr. Braithwaite's warning; Warcop's warnings, also. Yet how ungenerous, how grudging, to suspect her kindness! Has not a high authority admonished us to "think no evil"? But, on the other hand, has not

Digitized by Google

the highest authority of any—I say it with all reverence—bidden us add something of the serpent's wisdom to the harmlessness of the dove?

Oh! these great folk, these great folk, illiterate as they may appear from the scholar's standpoint, how amazingly well versed in practical and worldly knowledge, what past-masters, astute, invulnerable, in that fine art of living, of which he, poor blundering innocent, is too often so pitiably even disastrously ignorant!

If the above was too harsh a judgment, I had good reason, before the end of my second summer at Hover, to modify it, and that very agreeably. It happened thus.

August had come round again and grouse shooting along with it. A large party was staying in the house; and Hartover went out almost daily with his father's guests upon the moors—Her Magnificence and the ladies driving usually to meet the shooters at some picturesque spot, and share an *alfresco* luncheon with them. My time, consequently, was my own, and—save for an occasional visit to Mere Ban—I spent it in the library.

To me, one afternoon, there entered a most distinguished looking middle-aged gentleman. He made one or two inquiries about the portion of the catalogue upon which I was then engaged, and we fell into a—to me—most delightful conversation.

How charming he was—Alas that I should have to say, *was!* Such delicacy of taste, such variety of information, such soundness of common sense guid-

Digitized by Google

ing all; and such sweetness and grace of manner softening and gilding all, I have never met since, save in him and never expect to meet again.

After a time he spoke of Hartover, in whom he appeared to take a friendly even affectionate interest. I could answer frankly and hopefully, for in the last few months a change had come over the dear lad. It had been gradual, but continuous, thank God, without lapses or back-sliding.

My new acquaintance listened with evident pleasure.

"And now," he said at last, "I may tell you, that I have examined your pupil before I took the somewhat unwarrantable liberty of examining you. I wished to judge of you by what you had done, rather than by what you might say. And I must compliment you, my dear young gentleman, and heartily thank you—for the result. I found lofty and liberal sentiments, where I expected, from past experience, mean and grovelling ones. I found a desire for knowledge and for usefulness, where I expected only a longing after low pleasures. I found a sense of his position, where I had expected no sense at all save the fire of sex which we have in common with the animals. I congratulate you on your success thus far; and I trust you to remember this—that if you want support in your good work—as you may—you have only to write to me, freely and confidentially, and what I can do I will."

I bowed, puzzled; and then asked the plain question which had to be answered.

Digitized by Google

"And to whom am I to have the honour of addressing my letter, in such a case?"

He smiled.

"I had forgotten that you probably might not know I was here."

"I know little or nothing of the visitors."

"Write me at——"—and he mentioned a place and a name, hearing which I grew very red and told him—

"I had no idea, my lord, that I had the privilege of being in such illustrious company; although I suppose I ought to have found it out by now for myself, were I not the unpolished countryman I am."

I stood by sorely embarrassed; and began mentally to run through all I had said, or mis-said, to a statesman whose name was in all men's mouths just then, either for love or fear.

He was too simple, or perhaps too well aware of his own greatness, to enjoy my surprise; and offered his hand very cordially, saying—

"The first Lady Longmoor, your pupil's mother, was a kinswoman of mine—and, I may add, a singularly gifted and exquisite person. Few things would give me deeper pleasure than that her son should grow up worthy of such a mother."

With that he left me, both astonished that I had been talking with one of the most celebrated Englishmen of the time, and wondering whether I had not unwittingly stumbled upon relics of some early and pathetic romance unsuspected by his many adherents and admirers.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII

BUT there were things I had to know which, though they are written in books, not all the books in that glorious library could teach me. I must seek them elsewhere. Through his growing love of sport I saw, more and more, I could hold the boy and keep him from craving for the less cleanly and wholesome forms of excitement to be found among his stepmother's maids or in his father's cellars. The second I had almost ceased to fear. The first I feared far less than formerly; but handsome Mademoiselle, unless I misjudged her strangely, was not the young woman to forego a purpose once formed without a struggle. She was tenacious as she was supple. And it was only human nature, after all, that she should fight tooth and nail to preserve an influence, once gained, over so desirable a conquest as Hartover. Of my influence over him she must, I felt, be jealous most exceedingly. Wherefore it behoved me to be on my guard; and let slip no means, however apparently indirect, of securing his interest and entertainment.

To this end I learned all about the breeding of horses and hounds and mastered the contents of stud books. Whether these things were important or not in themselves, they were important to me because of the boy. Whether I cared to know about

Digitized by Google

them or not myself, I was bound to know more about them than the boy knew. So I read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested, as the Collect has it, all manner of equine and canine lore which would have been as so much Chinese, so much Hottentot, indeed, to the schools or common-rooms of my dear *alma mater.*

And this brings me, by devious courses, to the wonderful and tragical history of the little grey fox of Brocklesby Whins.

The meet was at Vendale Green, some six miles away from Hover—a three-cornered grass common at the end of the village street, with scattered cottages on two sides of it, and the river on the third. A grey day, with a low sky and mist hanging along the edges of the woodland. The air very still, in which sounds carried queerly.

Her ladyship, wrapped up to the eyes in Russian sables, had driven over with the ponies. She sat in the pony-chaise in the middle of the green, among a crowd of men in pink, and the horses and hounds, a veritable Queen of Beauty, as I could not but think, laughing, chaffing, with a gay word for all, gentle and simple. But, just as we were about to throw off, she sent her little groom to Colonel Esdaile; and, when he came, stepped out of the carriage and stood by him for a minute. She glanced at Hartover, and at me; and spoke quickly, emphasising what she said with a pretty gesture of the hand, while the colonel leaned down to her from the saddle.

Suddenly I saw him straighten himself up with a

Digitized by Google

jerk, his face oddly aged and grey, like that of a man smitten by illness.

"Impossible," he said sharply. "Utterly impossible." Then he seemed to pull himself together. The colour came back into his face, while her ladyship, laughing lightly, stepped into the pony-chaise, picked up the reins, and drew her furs about her.

"As you please," she called after him. "Good fortune to you—in any case. *Au revoir!*"

And she turned the ponies, swinging them neatly through the fringe of the crowd, across the turf and into the village street again.

The meaning of the episode, just what it implied, just what passed between them, I do not know to this day; but that it thoroughly upset the colonel's nerves and temper was only too apparent. Moreover, the good fortune she wished him proved shy. All the forenoon things went astray. The first covert had pigs in it, and that vexed him. In the next Squire Kenrick was shooting, and that vexed him more. In the third we found a fox, and the pack parted and chopped it at once, and that made him mad. He rated the huntsman, swore at the whips and at things in general, until the position became distinctly unpleasant. It was nearly three o'clock by that time, and nearly half the field had started home in high dudgeon, grumbling.

Finally, to my great surprise and, I must own, anger, he turned on me intimating I had ridden too forward and so interfered with his handling of the pack.

Digitized by Google

"Ride straight if you can, and if you dare, Mr. Brownlow," he said. "Let me remark, by the way, you've one of the best horses in the stables under you. But, in God's name, when I'm drawing, don't blunder into my hounds. Keep your place."

It was a lie and he knew it. I had never blundered into the hounds. My inclination was to tell him so to his face. But why make a scene? He had had the grace to speak in a low voice. No one save Warcop, who was beside me, could have heard what he said. I determined to bide my time, and show him, before the day was over, that I could ride as hard and as straight as he could himself.

Now where should we try?

"Brocklesby Whins," said Colonel Esdaile.

"You'll no ken Brocklesby Whins?"—this from Warcop, at my elbow, with a shrewd and, I fancied, approving glance. "Na—well, it's an unholy wild place, top o' a high saddle, wi' just a few ugly firs standing up among the whins—where a man was hanged, they say, of old—and long stone walls running down fra' it parting the pastures."

"There was a rare old fox in there on Tuesday," said Mankelow, the hard riding Irish doctor from Wetherley, anxious, as I thought, to keep talk going and make things a little more agreeable.

"And one we'd best let alone," Godley, the huntsman, put in. "I have it on my mind that he's not over canny. If he were a warlock out of the vale I should not wonder."

Digitized by Google

Here the dear boy, riding just ahead of me, laughed.

"Gad, Rusher," he said, "give us another chance at him. Four times we've run him, and four times he's lamed us a good horse, and vanished like magic at last."

"I've a feeling about that fox this afternoon," Godley went on. "And what's worse I forgot to take off my cap to him, and we'll have no luck after that."

The boy laughed again.

"Get along to Brocklesby," Colonel Esdaile said.

It would take too long to recount all the details of that historic run, though it is still toasted at hunt suppers as the most glorious achievement of the Hover, and, I own, remembrance of it stirs my blood even yet.

Suffice it, then, to say, that after the huntsman had thrown the hounds into the gorse and Tom the second whip, going in after them, had bade them "put him up, put him up" twice, the colonel gave a screech which might have been heard from Hartover to Vendale. I had hung back; and when I cleared the lower end of the cover, I could see the head of the pack well away down the hill, old Challenger leading, with the colonel, Mankelow, Warcop, and the first whip—the huntsman ranging up to them. The rest of the field were away to my left, on the wrong side of the wall, and the wrong side of the burn which ran straight down from the gorse.

At last the hounds checked a bit. They had not

Digitized by Google

settled well into their fox yet. So that, determination to prove myself—or, shall I say, to show off?—strong in me, I raced down abreast of them.

"Hullo, Mr. Brownlow," the colonel cried. "Sorry to see you're out of it!"

I made no answer, but turned the horse twenty yards back into the pasture and went at the wall. He was one of the best in the stables truly, a little brown horse with a tan muzzle, as hard as iron and as willing as the wind. The wall was close on six foot high, and I knew there must be a deep drop to the burn on the other side; but the devil of wounded pride was awake in me, and, to my shame, I did not care if I broke my neck or not. They all looked at me, twenty of the field behind me, and five in the pasture in front. They never thought I should dare it; and they never thought I could do it.

The brown tipped it with all four feet, but as neat as a deer; and, when he saw the burn beyond, stretched himself out and gave a spring.

"Give him his head, sir," shouted Warcop.

And so I did, but the drop was so deep that, when he lighted, he went head over heels, and I too.

I got on to my feet and picked my horse up, though aware of a wonderful singing in my ears.

There was a cry of—"You're not hurt?"

"Not a bit," I told them.

"No one can say that young gentleman's afraid of fences," quoth the doctor genially.

But Colonel Esdaile answered—"We shall see.

Digitized by Google

Temper and pluck aren't the same thing, my good friend."

There we were, six of us; and the rest of the field, for the time being, nowhere. Then the fox went down Mr. Braithwaite's lane, and we went down the lane too; and by that time we were out of the pastures and into the vale. Here it was four to six miles across—small fallows and high dykes, with timber and rails and "all manner o' harse-traps" as Warcop had it. As for riding straight, no man living I believe could have done so. But we stuck together, broke the rails for each other, turn and turn about, though riding terribly jealous; and each man had his fall, and each caught his neighbour's horse for him. And all the while—again, more shame to me—I nursed my anger against the colonel, and bided my time till I could be even with him and make him eat those ugly words about pluck and temper.

At last—and we were not sorry—we had a check in a grass field, with low gorse-grown banks to it and a certain amount of cover in the way of thorn brakes and withered bracken. The steam rose in a white cloud off the horses, to be cleared by a bleak northerly draw of wind which cried now and again through the spare grass and bare branches.

"Well, gentlemen, this is a very good thing," Mankelow said, as he settled himself—"forty-two minutes gone, and nine miles too, if I know my country; and in ten minutes more he's a dead fox. I hope to righteousness he will be, for my shirt's worked

Digitized by Google

up between my shoulders and I've not had a pinch of snuff since I started."

"A very good thing, as afternoon runs are wont to be," Godley, the huntsman, echoed. "And may be better yet, for him at least. For as to his being a dead fox, we've no killed the vermin yet. An' there he is!"

Sure enough, stealing back into the cover we had just left was a little grey fox.

"I've nere seen so small a fox before nor since, nor one so grey," quoth Warcop; "with a nose like a ferret's on to him—no canny at all, looks fifty years old for aught I can tell."

He saw us, moreover; but instead of slipping on into cover and making good his point home again, as any decent fox would have done after doubling, he sat down in the field and looked at us; and then, jumping up, went back upon his own line, as if he didn't care whether he ran to the world's end.

What work we had to get the hounds on to him! But, when we capped them, it was heads up and tails down and they went as though they had been shot from a gun. We were away through farm and farm, parish and parish—picking up some of the field on our way—till I felt as though I had been in the saddle all my life and should never get out of it. Fallow, pasture, plough, dale, hedge, dyke—the same thing all over again, yet new each time. Then at last my chance came.

We had got out into big lowland grass fields once more. The colonel and I were leading. I raced him

Digitized by Google

over a meadow, every inch, up to a brook, and over it, and on. I saw a nasty fence before us—a double rail with a young quick hedge in the middle, and beyond it a road some four feet below. The road was loose and stony and to fly the thing was to smash oneself to a dead certainty. I knew I was going too fast for in and out leaping, so I was forced to gather up the brown and sore work I had to do it.

The colonel held on at full speed, and was five lengths ahead in a second. I thought at first he was going to sweep over the whole. But no. As he neared it, I saw him drop into his saddle, throw himself back, and exerting his huge strength in one long gentle pull, draw his great bay horse together till his last strides were like the skips of a cat. Then a pause, with its nose almost on the rail, and in and out into the road; and over the opposite fence. And there the colonel turned and looked at me, while half a dozen voices shouted—"Nobly done."

I was all the madder; but I kept my head. I knew how the brown could leap, if he were only not angered; and by the time I got him up to the rail, he was well upon his haunches. In and out, and over I went too, and half a dozen more voices, from the craners, called—"Hurrah—splendid, Brownlow, Good for you, sir."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV

I RANGED up again on the colonel's quarter. He looked round.

"You got over after all?" he drawled. "I thought you seemed funking a little."

"You are mistaken, then, sir!" said I, dryly.

At that moment I heard a shout.

I knew what had happened by instinct. The noise went through me like a knife. Where was Hartover? Where had he been all this while? I pulled the brown onto his haunches with a force which threw me on his neck—looking round for the dear boy—lost my balance and rolled off into a fallow.

I never heeded; but sprang to my feet, ran back wildly. There was a knot of men and horses down in the road. I leapt over the fence.

"Let me come! Let me pass! Let me see!" said I, thrusting through them—though dreading what I should see.

"You ought to have been with him, sir!" cried an old pink. "You ought not to have let him."

"I know it, I know it. God have mercy on me!" cried I, so bitterly, that the old gentleman laid his hand kindly on my shoulder.

"Be calm, sir, be calm. He is not killed"—But I heard no more.

The boy lay in the road, his eyes closed, his head

Digitized by Google

on Warcop's knee. Mankelow knelt beside him, feeling him all over carefully. Men in pink, and steaming horses stood around in the grey light of the December day. Overhead a flight of peewits flapped with their oft-repeated mournful cry. And I suffered an anguish of self-reproach and of fear, which made seconds lengthen out into hours of suspense and mental torture. Vain fool that I had been, nursing my own wounded pride, self-absorbed, forgetful of love, neglectful of duty!

At last Mankelow spoke.

"The wind knocked out of him; but, thank God, no bones are broken. Here, gentlemen, any of you got some brandy?"

A dozen flasks were held out.

"Raise his lordship's head a bit higher—so—there—that's better."

By now I was kneeling too, helping to support the boy. With a gulp and struggle he swallowed a little of the brandy.

His eyes opened. He looked up and smiled at me.

"What's the row, dear old man? Gad, how it burns though. What the deuce are they doing to me?"

"Pulling you back over the border for all we're worth, my lord," Mankelow said cheerily.

As to me, I could not speak. Nor could Warcop either. Tears were running down his cheeks.

"Oh! I'm all right," the boy said, sitting up. "And I'm ashamed of wasting your time and spoiling your sport like this, gentlemen. But those stones

Digitized by Google

aren't precisely a feather-bed to light on suddenly. Did I faint? Really I beg your pardon. Forgive me."

With Warcop's help and mine he got onto his feet, though still evidently somewhat dazed and giddy.

"What had he better do?" I asked Mankelow, hurriedly.

"Just what he likes. Go home or go on—go on, I should say, if his horse is fit to carry him."

"Oh! the horse is fit enough," someone volunteered—"not a scratch upon him."

"What will you do, my lord?" Warcop asked.

"Why, kill that demon of a little grey fox to be sure," the boy answered, laughing.

"'Ods, well spoken. But ye'll ride my horse, not your own, to the kill, my lord, or I leave your service by daybreak to-morrow. He mayn't have a scratch, but he needs must be a bit stale or a bit skeery—safer for old bones like mine, which have been broken too often to break any more, by the same token."

And so it was settled. But the pack was far away by this time, with the colonel, the two whips, and Godley. The sound of them came down the wind now and again; and we saw them going up, up, up, across wide rusty pastures, where the scent lay less heavy. They were not going very fast, but very steady; swinging right and left over the turf, and hanging a little at the gaps in the stone walls and ragged blackthorn hedges, and always old Challenger led.

Digitized by Google

And up, up, up, we went after them, the boy riding gallantly, quite himself again, and in pretty spirits, though still rather white in the face. Towards both Warcop and me he was curiously gentle and tender—which filled me, only the more, with shame and self-reproach. Up, up, up, while one after another the field dropped away from us—Mankelow held out longest—till only we three were left. Up, up, up, still gaining on the pack, which was going slowly, although there seemed to be no check in them yet. Then for five minutes would come a rush; and each time the rush came we could see the horses in front of us were the worse for it. But they pushed on doggedly; and, for some reason, the colonel never looked back. He had ridden right on when the boy fell. He rode right on still, forcing his horse, as it seemed to me, rather mercilessly. Was it conceivable he wanted not to know who came behind him? That he was, in a way, afraid to look back? I remembered the little episode on Vendale Green in the morning, his answer—"Impossible, utterly impossible"—to her ladyship, that strange look as of sudden illness, and her ladyship's light laugh. But I put remembrance from me. It could do no good to let my fancy run wild. And who was I, after all, to judge my neighbour, having made so sorry a figure in respect of plain duty, let alone affection, myself?

We began to get in among the hills. The hounds ran merrily enough up a gulley on our right, full of ash and oak scrub; and, thanks to a short cut of Warcop's, we joined them, or rather they swept past us,

Digitized by Google

as we neared the top. Then we were out on the open fell, rattling along the stone tracks.

The horses began to suffer now. The colonel's big bay gave in first. We saw his gallop fall to a canter, his canter to a trot. Then the first whip's horse, a great flea-bitten grey, stood stock still in a deep bottom and he had to get off and lead it up through the heather. And then the huntsman's black horse went. As we came up with them I could hear the poor beast rattling in the throat. And the evening was falling fast; and still the colonel did not look back.

The bay had slowed down to a walk. He stumbled. Colonel Esdaile hauled him up, flung his leg across the pommel of the saddle and lighted stiffly on his feet.

"Another good horse gone," he said.

And only then, deliberately, as if making a great effort over himself, he turned and looked at us. Hartover was on the near side of the road, I next to him, and Warcop a couple of lengths behind.

The colonel left the bay standing, walked across and laid his hand on the boy's knee.

"George," he cried hoarsely, "George—I did not know you were still up!"—and his voice had a queer fall and break in it.

"Why, Rusher, what's the matter?" the boy asked, struck, as we all were I think, by the strangeness of his manner. "It's not like you to be so awfully done."

Digitized by Google

But he made no answer; only presently turning to the huntsman—

"We must whip off," he said.

"We must, Colonel, more's the pity. This is the fifth time the ungodly vermin has brought us harm. He's beat us. I knew he would."

"Whip off? And wha' ull do it?" quoth Warcop, pointing to the long line of white specks streaming over the fell.

"I'll try," Tom, the second whip, said rather hopelessly.

"Yer harse is as weak as a two-day littered pup as it is—and gin ye fail—I——"

"The brown would do it," I cut in. "There's plenty left in him yet. Jump on him, Warcop, and see."

I was in the act of slipping off, when the dear boy shouted—"No, do it yourself."

"But Warcop——"

"I say do it. That horse is my father's, and I say no one shall crop him to-day but you, by——"—and he swore a wicked little oath. "After riding him as you have done, you shall be able to say you stopped the Hover when no man else could."

"That's brave," cried Warcop. "I'll see to his lordship. Here, take my long whip, sir, and give the brown his head. And as you love your life, sir, beware of the swallow-holes way up top o' the fell."

I turned, as in courtesy bound, to the colonel for his sanction. But he took no notice of me or of anyone, standing beside his panting, sobbing horse, heed-

Digitized by Google

less, like a man dumb and distraught, staring out over the mighty expanse of moorland. Wondering, I inwardly echoed the boy's inquiry—what ailed him? With his splendid endurance, fruit of his splendid health and strength, it passed understanding that he should be so beat.

But this was no time either for speculation or ceremony; and I rattled away after Tom, who was already raking up the hill; overtook, and passed him, in the deep ling and moss; and left him, tootling dolefully, far behind.

It was lighter up here. I looked round. Where was I? At the world's end? No, rather at the parting of two worlds, on the very roof of England. Below me a network of green valleys, the mist lying in soft white streaks and patches. The reek of great manufacturing towns, too, dingy sheets of coal smoke, pierced here and there by groups of tall black chimneys, like the masts of sunken ships piercing the uneasy surface of a leaden sea. Beyond all, in the west, a wide flung crimson of sunset, against which barriers of dun-coloured vapour rose, slowly eating it up. And around me, for miles and miles, the grand wind-swept desolation of the fells.

I could almost have hoped, just then, I should fail to stop the pack. For I longed to ride on, like some legendary Wild Huntsman of yore, for ever and ever; poverty, lameness, all earthly ills cast behind me, abolished and forgot.

And, at the moment, my hope seemed likely enough of fulfilment.

Digitized by Google

I was abreast of them now, ahead of them—I, the quiet scholar—rating, hulloing, cracking; and they minded me no more than a crow. How could they mind me? For there, not fifty yards in front, crawled through the under dusk, beneath a stone wall, a small grey draggled ghost—leapt at the wall and fell back. A few paces to the left was a gap. I saw his dark form glance through it.

I remember springing off, casting the brown loose in my hurry, and scrambling through the gap; to find, behind it, a wide black fissure, like a hungry ragged-lipped mouth, yawning in the surface of the moor. Down it the fox had gone. Down it the hounds would go too, unless I could hold them.

And the foremost were upon me already—a seething mass of black, white, and tan, of red jaws, and white teeth, of steam and rank hot smell. I faced them, lashing, shouting, swearing too, I am afraid, like any drunken bargee; but they bore on me with irresistible weight, driving me back to the lip of that horrible open mouth, and over the lip, falling, falling, along with me, through fathoms of chill echoing dark—where?

Almighty God alone knew.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV

WHEN I came to myself I was lying on my back, with something soft and warm upon me. It was a hound, and alive. I thrust him off. There was something soft and warm under me, too, heaving and struggling.

Gradually I became aware that I was in all but utter obscurity among a heap of hounds. My first feeling was of terror. Would they attack me? Hideous thought, to be torn to pieces there in that dark pit—and if one began, I knew, all would join. And then, the Lord have mercy on my soul.

I called to them, by all their names which I could recollect, cheerfully, soothingly, as I struggled out from among them; and my courage rose as I found them peaceable. Poor beasts, they knew my voice; and tired, stunned, terror-stricken, let me drag them up one by one, and set them on their legs, on a shelf which seemed, from its darkness, to be the mouth of a horizontal cavern.

Three times I scrambled from that shelf down into the narrow bottom of the pit, and dug out hound after hound. I recovered, I think, seven. Two were dead. One had its leg broke, and howled sadly as I laid hold of it. I got my handkerchief and tied it up all in the darkness; and the poor thing licked my hand.

Digitized by Google

There were more below; but they were jammed tight and motionless in a narrow cleft. They must be dead. I hoped they were dead. I stood long bending over them, touching them, to watch for a struggle or a moan, but all was still. The others moved uneasily about the ledge, and now and then gave a melancholy howl, which was answered by their brothers in the open air some thirty feet, as I judged, above.

I got on the ledge again and sat among them; looking up to the mouth of the pit, and rating back the pack when any of them seemed disposed to leap down.

I was not frightened, nor unhappy, except about the hounds. But I had saved the body of the pack. Thank God for that—for was it not worth thanking God for? And my own life was saved—thank God for that also. When I gazed at the mouth of my dungeon, now scarcely discernible against the night sky, it seemed little sort of miraculous that I should have escaped.

But I was not by any means unhurt. Every angle and point of my poor bones felt knocked off, and ached and smarted accordingly. Moreover, I had certainly broken my head; for I found that I had bled, and I suspect a good deal. That perhaps did me good, and brought me to my senses in time to rescue the hounds. I was fearfully tired, too, both with the run, and with the violent exercise or digging out the dogs; and as hungry as a man should be after hunting. Cold I was not and had no fear of being;

Digitized by Google

for the poor dear hounds nestled against me, keeping both me and themselves warm.

I sat there on the ledge, my feet hanging over, for I know not how long. The hounds above had been silent for some time. I suppose they had gone away. Those round me had grown silent too. There was no sound save the crying of the wind over the fells, and the breathing of the dogs who curled off to sleep. I only wished I could sleep also; but I ached too much.

I amused myself by speculating where the pack would go; where the brown horse would go; where my companions were. They would not be anxious about me. They would take for granted that I could not stop the pack, that it had gone over the fells, and that we were all happed up at some farm-house. They would shelter at some farm-house themselves; and come and find us to-morrow morning. They could trace us easily enough by the hoof-marks—and all would be right.

Then I began thinking about Mr. Braithwaite, and our talks on political economy, and the Poor Law and parliamentary reform—and about Nellie. And I started; for I heard Nellie's voice call me by name, so plainly that surely I could not have been asleep?

I crawled away a yard or two, and lay down on the smooth rock. My head rested against the rock-wall; and I began thinking, thinking again, about Nellie, about the dear boy. This time I really fell asleep, and slept I know not how long.

At last I woke—an evil waking. It was some time

Digitized by Google

before I could recollect where I was. Gradually, I became conscious of a sense of pain from head to foot, and then a thirst. Oh! that thirst! It explained to me all the misery of which I had read about soldiers waking on the field of battle, their wounds aching with cold, while they cried in vain for a drop of water to cool their tongues. As is the case with the strange thirst which takes one after a long run, it soon amounted to absolute torment. I must unknowingly have moved in my sleep, for my head was lying on something cold and soft. It was a dead hound. I shuddered at first; but, when I felt his skin damp, I actually put my lips against it to cool them.

The wind above on the moors had fallen, and there was a great silence. And gradually, out of the silence, I became aware—or was it only my fevered fancy?—of a sound of water dropping. I listened till I was sure. What more common, after all, than to find water underground in such a pit, whether it be coal-shaft or limestone canyon?

If there were a drop within reach, I must win it or go mad. The sound seemed to come from behind me, in the recesses of the cavern at the mouth of which I believed myself to be. I turned to creep onward. Thoughts of choke-damp, of unknown abysses, crossed my mind, making me shudder and pause. But only for an instant. The terrible thirst drove men on, like Io driven by the terrible gadfly.

I crept upon hands and knees, feeling continually for the rock-wall for fear of losing my way. As I

Digitized by Google

advanced the trickling sound grew clearer and louder, and my heart beat high with hope. I must have gone full forty yards, when I lost touch of the rock-wall on my left. In sudden terror I tried back, and found it again. I made out that it turned sharp away almost at right angles; but I dared not leave it, and so crawled on over the smooth floor of rock.

The trickling noise was behind me now, growing fainter and fainter. What could I do? Aching, and all but exhausted though I was, I faced about and felt my way back to the corner again.

The problem was how to strike out from the wall without losing myself? The old child's story of Tom Thumb came into my head, and of how he found his way home, when his parents left him in the wood, by the crumbs of bread which he had strewed along the path. I had some sandwiches; but I had eaten most of them at midday. Never spendthrift searched for his last guinea more eagerly than I for any remains of that meal! I found some scraps in my pocket, and, so doing, gave a feeble hurrah which boomed, long and ghastly, through the rough arches of the doleful place, making me tremble at my own voice. Crumbling up the scraps, and strewing them sparingly as I went, I launched forth into the unknown dark.

I crept on, I know not how far, across the smooth floor, which from the feel of it I judged to be of stalagmite. The trickling noise grew louder now; and, mixed with it, a dull roar, as of water falling into a pool at some great depth. I felt in vain for

Digitized by Google

any damp spot. The stalagmite had been wet enough once, of course, but, alas! was dry as marble now.

All at once I stopped, with an emotion of horror. I had put my hand forward, as usual; but I put it upon nothing. I was thoroughly scared, and shrank back. Alone there in an invisible chaos, with bruised limbs and overheated brain, a hundred strange fancies assailed me before I hit upon the truth. I was on the verge of an unseen gulf. There could be no doubt about it. On either side I touched, trembling, and found all along a smooth ledge of stalagmite and then empty space. Yet just beyond, seemingly not twenty yards from me, was the torturing sound of cool water, falling, falling.

Desperate, I leant over, and thrust my arm down as far as I could reach in hopes of finding some ledge onto which I might lower myself. There was none. The edge of stalagmite curled over in a deep rim. And I could hear plainly now, as I bent my head down, the sound of a running stream perhaps a hundred feet below.

What if the crust broke off? What if I slipped forward? Panic-stricken, I tried to move back; and found it not so easy. For the surface of the floor was so even I could obtain no hold. I lost my nerve utterly, almost lost my recollection.

After a minute's frenzied struggle, however, I was safe, and making my way back along my line of crumbs. It seemed an age ere I reached the rock-wall again. And when I reached it, I could do no more; but sank down too exhausted to move.

Digitized by Google

After that confusion grew on me. Cruel fantastic dreams or visions—I know not which, for I cannot tell whether I slept or woke—pursued me. Now Hartover lay in the stony road again, white, with closed eyes; and Mankelow, bending over him, whispered that he was dead. Now I wandered across green fields by a pleasant brook, and Nellie Braithwaite came to meet me through the damp sweet grasses, a cup of clear spring water in her hand. Now I was at Cambridge, in the staid and familiar routine of the university once again. And now the hounds roused up, clamouring and hungry. They were eating their dead brothers first, and next they would eat me. And I was bound hand and foot so that escape was impossible. Again I saw their red jaws and white gleaming teeth, and smelt the rank hot smell of them. But Nellie Braithwaite came between them and me, and drove them off, and laid her hand upon my parched forehead—so cool it was! And now the dear boy was with her. The two walked past me, hand in hand, talking earnestly and smiling on one another with a certain sweet seriousness infinitely lovely, and went forward into the deeper darkness of the cave. I knew they would reach the edge of that smooth deceitful stalagmite floor and topple into the abyss. I tried to warn them, called and shrieked to them; but my voice was no more than the thinnest thread of sound which they did not, could not, hear.

After that, I know not what. Deepening confusion, tumult, sense of fruitless effort, of swift para-

Digitized by Google

lysing fear. But through it all, three images were constantly before me during that terrible night—water, Nellie Braithwaite and always with her Hartover, the gallant beautiful boy—till, merciful stupor closing down on me, I lapsed into unconsciousness once more.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT was this sound beating upon my weary brain, dragging my reason and senses up from some measureless depth, back from some measureless distance? Men's voices and the baying of hounds. At last a call I could not mistake, friendly and clear yet solemn, awe-stricken.

"Speak, in God's name, gin there's any living soul within!"

I opened my eyes and feebly answered Warcop's hail. From the glimmering light, in the direction whence his voice came, I understood it must be broad day at the cavern's mouth. I tried to crawl towards it; but, before I was half-way, I saw the glow of a red coat and felt strong arms about me. Warcop, stooping under the low rock-roof, lifted and carried me as tenderly as though I had been his own child.

"Puir laddie, puir laddie! Ye've had a sair enough night o' it, I'll warrant."

"But I stopped them—I saved the pack," I told him.

"Did ye then? Eh! but I kenned ye were worth yer saut"—soothingly.

"Water." I implored him. "Water—and give the hounds some too."

Then I believe my mind wandered. The transition was so rapid. The relief so great.

Digitized by Google

Water they had none. But someone gave me sherry; and, after a while, I revived, to find the dear boy hugging and kissing me, and crying—bless his heart—like a baby.

I looked about me. The scene was a strange one. An irregular patch of blue sky far away. Towering walls of stained, grey rock on either hand; and let, as down a well, by ropes from above, standing amid débris of torn heather and gorse and fragments of fallen stone, the hounds leaping round them, Warcop, Hartover, Godley the huntsman, and, last but by no means least, Colonel Esdaile himself. The queer mood of yesterday had passed from him. His handsome face was eager, his eye bright. Very cordially he shook me by the hand.

"An' he saved the pack, he says," Warcop cried.

"Yes, I got through the gap just in time, and stopped them. But the leading hounds pushed me over and in——"

"There, don't talk," the colonel said kindly. "But I thank you, sir, I thank you."

I was excited and not easily to be silenced.

"Dig," I told them, "dig. There are two more down there in the pit, just at your feet. I could not get them out. I dug out the rest"—and I looked at my swollen disfigured hands.

They got to work and brought out two bodies.

"Marchioness and t' owd Challenger—and t' fox in his mouth yet!"

"Yes," I said. "He was down first. He leapt

Digitized by Google

under my arm. Oh! my God, it was dreadful, dreadful."

And, fairly overcome at remembrance of that grim struggle, I covered my face with my hands. If the boy had not been there I should have broken down altogether. When I opened my eyes again, Godley was holding up the poor old badger-pie with the fox still clenched in his noble jaws. Suddenly he laid the dead hound down and burst out crying.

"Ah! sir, that was a hound!"

"Well, he died as he lived," said the colonel, and turned his head away. I believe, at the moment, there was not a dry eye among them.

"You must see to my old man," the boy cried impatiently. "He's ill, worn out. You must get him out of this infernal hole. Draw him up at once."

And drawn up I was, and seated in the delicate winter sunshine and fresh air, upon the heath—where I turned off faint again and called for water. They got me some from a neighbouring bog—foul brown stuff, but never was draught more delicious.

Then they hauled up the hounds, quite gentle but too stiff and bruised to walk.

"Carry them to the water," I begged. "They're dying of thirst like me."

Some farm men shouldered them; and I lay with my head on Hartover's knee, and watched the poor beasts lapping and rolling in a bog hole, with a sort of dreamy happiness.

"Oh, my dear old man, what I have gone through about you!"

Digitized by Google

"Why? You should have taken for granted that I was safe at some farm-house."

"But I did not—I could not! I heard Warcop warn you about the swallow-holes when you started, and I knew you had fallen into one. And I never slept a wink all night. I fancied I heard you calling me."

"What would you have done, if I had been killed?" I asked, I know not why, looking up into his face.

He did not answer for a minute.

"Died, I hope."

"You must not talk so."

"I should have turned again into the blackguard I was six months ago. And I had rather be dead than that."

"You must not talk so, dear boy," I repeated feebly. "You must trust in God, not in me."

But I felt then that I had not, indeed, lived in vain.

The hounds were buried honourably where they fell. Then the huntsman brought the fox up to the colonel.

"And what shall I do with this uncanny devil?" And he shook him with rage as he spoke. "Five runs he has given us, and lamed our best horses every time; and this is his last trick, and his worst. I believe he is no fox, but a witch, sir. That's my creed, and we'll hear presently of some old woman having vanished out of the vale. We'll have the brute's trimmings anyhow!"

Digitized by Google

And he went to take out his knife.

"Stop," cried the colonel. "Don't touch him. Mr. Brownlow, I shall have that fox stuffed, and give it to you, as a remembrance of this day. And I want one word with you, sir. No, don't get up—George may hear me. I was rude to you yesterday and more than rude; and you have repaid me by risking your life to save my pack. I beg your pardon. I never did so to any man on earth—but I say, sir, I beg your pardon."

I held out my hand and tried to laugh.

"My dear sir, I was vain and foolish—and not for the first time,—I irritated you. Pray do not speak of such a trifle. As for saving the hounds, it was only one's duty."

The Rusher looked at me fixedly.

"I will say one thing more, Mr. Brownlow."—He had quite dropped his usual fine gentleman drawl.—"When you first came, you used to talk a good deal about duty."

"A good deal too much, I fear," said I, recollecting my pedantry.

"I used to think it all cant. I understand now what you meant by duty; and am much obliged to you for teaching me."

And he turned away, after shaking me again by the hand.

They took me down upon a pony; and as I went, I heard all their story. When I did not return, they had attempted to follow; but had been driven back by mist and darkness. The boy had contrived to

Digitized by Google

make Warcop share his own fears about swallow-holes; and when they started from Squire Kenrick's —where they had passed the night—Warcop pressed into their service two or three labouring men, with ropes, a spade and crowbar. They had found us easily enough. Some of the hounds had come down by Squire Kenrick's house the night before. Others were heard of in the morning. The hoofs of the brown horse led them easily over the fells. Soon they saw him grazing, stiff, but well. After that the hoof-marks led them on, wherever I had crossed a boggy or muddy spot, straight to the gap. And— "ere we came to it," Warcop said, "t' puir hounds began calling to us like Christian bairns."

So ended the wonderful little grey fox of Brocklesby Whins. He stands to this day stuffed in my study; and, as I look at him, I often thank him for his good deeds to me. For that hunting had its consequences. It made a fast friend of the colonel, who —so I found afterwards—went about extolling me (I cannot see why) as a miracle of valour and virtue. And a fast friend, also, of all connected with the hunt, from Sir Rodney Pochard, of racing fame, down to the grooms and stable helpers.—These last so overloaded me with praise, that I was forced to beg them to say no more about the matter. I had done nothing but what, I felt sure, any and every one of them would have done in my place—a sentiment which, at least, comforted the good fellows' self-esteem.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVII

BUT the most surprising consequence of my adventure manifested itself next day when—as I sat disfigured and aching, bandaged and plastered, feeling as if I had not a whole bone in my wretched carcass—I heard a gentle rap at the study door and, to my amazement, Her Magnificence walked in.

It was the first time, as far as I could recollect, she had entered that room for over a year, yet she came in as naturally as though she was there every day; and, smiling, pulled up a chair, sat down by the fireside and inquired after me with most engaging solicitude.—"Was I much hurt? What a truly frightful experience! Had I everything I needed? Quite, quite sure? And were the servants attentive, really taking proper care of me?"—Then followed an outburst of extravagant compliment—rank flattery, I ought to label it; but, delivered so gracefully, with such a bewitching air of sincerity, that I tried to persuade myself it was not the delicious poison I very well knew it to be. And so, like any other young man cajoled by a beautiful woman, I absorbed it greedily, murmuring clumsy thanks, angry with myself, the while, that I could not find a hundred and one pretty nothings to say to her in return.

But our interview did not end there. Having thus

Digitized by Google

softened the ground with this rain of compliment, she went on to far more serious subjects.

"How could they ever repay me for all I had done for dear George? Everyone was talking of the improvement in his habits and character, in his very countenance. It was delightful, and made her think with real pain of the time when—as she supposed—we should be obliged to part, and dear George go into the Guards."

I gave a start.

"I trust that day may be very distant."

She had hoped so too; but my lord felt it to be the right thing. "As you know, Mr. Brownlow, his father very seldom interferes—perhaps it would have been better"—and she sighed—"if he had interfered more often. His wretched state of health!—But when he does give an order, naturally it has to be obeyed."

She paused for my assent. Rightly or wrongly, my suspicions began to be aroused. I made no reply.

"And George himself," she continued, "is, I understand, so anxious—he and his father really agree for once, I gather"—with a meaning smile and raising of the dark eyebrows—"that I am afraid he must join his regiment next spring."

"Next spring!" I cried, with a very blank face. The blow was such an unexpected and heavy one.

"As for yourself, dear Mr. Brownlow," she said eagerly, "you must not think it will lessen our interest in your future, or make anything but an improve-

Digitized by Google

ment in your position. We know from Dr. Marston all about your leaving college. And I have told my lord—who, I am happy to say, feels with me—that the least we can do, after all you have done for us, is to enable you to return to Cambridge and take your—degree—don't they call it?"

"Oh! you are too kind, too kind—but——"

"We can listen to no buts. Of course we should have liked to keep you here as librarian; only that would be selfish. No, clearly you must return to Cambridge and complete your course there. And then, later, if you went into the Church, you know, directly one of our livings fell vacant you may be sure there is no one we should think of sooner than you."

"Oh! madam," I cried, greatly affected by the secure and prosperous future thus opened before me, "you are too good, too generous. Yet I shall deeply regret leaving Hover, not only on my own account but on Lord Hartover's."

"He will have cause to regret it also. But he must grow up, he must enter on life, poor dear fellow."

"That is what I dread. I cannot but feel he is too"—I was going to say weak, but stopped myself—"hardly old enough to face the many temptations of such a life and profession. Not that I am vain enough, believe me, to imagine my presence is necessary to keep Lord Hartover out of harm. Any good tutor—and you can find twenty better than I—could do that. But the life of a young Guardsman in Lon-

Digitized by Google

don—you do not know, madam, what it is, and must be."

She moved a little, leaning forward and raising her hand to shield her face from the fire which played on her jewelled bracelets and rings. I seemed to catch a lurking laughter in her downcast eyes, that said—so I interpreted it at least, by later events—"I know infinitely better than you, in any case, my innocent and worthy youth!" But she answered with a demure sigh—she could be so deliciously demure when she chose—

"Ah! yes, I have often put that before my lord very strongly—not that I, of course, as you say, know anything about such matters; except that young men in town are very foolish and do very shocking things sometimes. But my lord's mind is so thoroughly made up on the subject."

"I wonder," I said quite bitterly, "that Mr. Halidane, who has, as I understand, so much influence over his lordship in religious questions, does not lay before him the great danger to which his son is exposed by this resolution."

"Would you kindly speak to Mr. Halidane yourself about it?" said she.

I felt what a clever fence her answer was; and could only reply, that I feared that my words would have very little weight with him.

"Oh! you underrate yourself, as usual. You are not aware—and really it is better you should not be or you might become quite alarmingly powerful—of the amount of influence you gain over everyone.

Digitized by Google

Even over Colonel Esdaile, whom you seem to have completely won at last. And, I must confess it, over me, as well."

"Over you, madam?" I said, in a tone which hardly concealed reproach for her flattery.

"Well—why not? Your influence over me is a perfectly simple and harmless one. You are so different from the rest of the people round me. Whoever is not honest, you are; and it is so pleasant—so pleasant and so new—to have someone in this house whom one can trust to tell one the real truth."

And she gave me one of those glances by which she knew so well how to pour fire along young veins.

"And therefore—since I know I can have perfect faith in you, dear Mr. Brownlow—I have long wanted to say something to you which you will, of course, never repeat—not even to George. Really, I hardly like to talk about it even to you; but you must see, by this time, how I am circumstanced. My poor dear lord—you know I can hardly consult him—alas!—And Colonel Esdaile—he is the best and simplest-hearted of creatures—but he has his own easy Guardsman's view of such things—so very different from yours. And so"—she leaned more towards me—"I really have no one, in this matter, to ask to help and counsel me except yourself."

"Why not consult Mr. Halidane?" I asked, trying to keep my head under this shower of appeal and of sudden intimacy. For my heart misgave me that something was coming, which it would tax

Digitized by Google

all the brain I possessed to meet and to deal with.

My lady sat upright, with a pretty air of indifference.

"Oh! Mr. Halidane is a most admirable man," she said. "So perfectly pious, you know, and excellent."

I observed that in words, at all events, she invariably upheld that somewhat dubious personage.

"But to tell you the truth—since you are in the habit of telling it yourself"—here another captivating smile made its appearance—"in some ways I am just a wee bit afraid of him. He might not quite—quite understand somehow, you know. And so, as I say, I have no one to turn to but you. By myself, I dare not act. It might make quite unnecessary disagreeables and complications. You see, I was married very young, Mr. Brownlow—as a mere child in fact. I am little better than a child even now, I am afraid, in many respects. I have had very little experience of the world, owing to my poor husband's wretched health, which makes him practically a recluse. And I had hardly any education. My mother—Ah! I am sure you are in pain?"

"If I were, you would make me forget it," I said, half intoxicated by her sudden confidence.

I did not know then how little such confidences are worth. How women of the world will make them to men, whom they do not look upon as their equals but merely as their tools, partly to gain power over them, and partly, I believe, for the pleasure of talking about themselves. Perhaps, poor things, there may

Digitized by Google

be an honest relief in opening their hearts to someone who is clever, and, as they fancy, less sophisticated than themselves. Anyhow, this was not the last of such strange confidences which I received from her and from other fine ladies also.

"I had so little education," she repeated. "I often envy you your scholarship, and all the delightful intellectual society which you must have enjoyed at Cambridge. I believe I should have been very blue myself if I had only had the opportunity."

The naughtiest temptation came over me to make some pretty speech, which would delude her into the notion that she was deluding me. But, happily for my honesty, the speech was so slow in shaping itself that she had run on again before I could bring it forth.

"And so I have had only one weapon to defend myself with, in all I have gone through—for I have gone through a great deal, Mr. Brownlow—and that has been, to be perfectly straightforward, and honourable, to speak the exact truth, and to cling to those who are straightforward also. I only wish I never met any other sort of people! Therefore—and now I really must tell you—I, too, wish George, dear beautiful boy, to leave home. Not because I wish to see him in the Guards, of course; but because—because—I am afraid there are certain influences at home which are quite as dangerous, and really may be more so, than any London ones. What do you think about Mademoiselle Fédore?"

I thanked Heaven I had not lost my head. Here

Digitized by Google

was a snare indeed! How I discerned it I can hardly tell—certainly by no native wit of my own. But, I suppose, that passion for the boy and his welfare which had become the fixed idea of my life, made me as suspicious and quick to discern the approach of peril, as instinct makes the mother-bird. And at once I saw—or thought I saw—peril at hand. What if she should make use of anything I told her, to raise a storm in Lord Longmoor's breast against the poor tempted lad? And, even if she were not base enough for that, by betraying my verdict to Halidane she might—would certainly—do the evil work still more effectually. Or—almost worse of all—she might betray it to the boy himself, and lose me his trust for ever. No. I would tell her nothing, even though I had to lie to conceal it; and so I answered, as in real astonishment.

"Mademoiselle Fédore, madam! She is your ladyship's maid, I believe?"

"Yes, yes. What do you know about her? You must tell me."

"I, madam? I never exchanged a word with her in my life—save on the first evening I came here as I was looking at the ball from the gallery."

"Yes—the night poor George was so tipsy. Yes—and what did she say then?"

"Nothing about him, I am certain. And I am not likely to forget what passed, for she did me the great pleasure of pointing out your ladyship to me for the first time."

And I actually had the audacity to look up in her

Digitized by Google

face, insinuating that so lovely a sight had made an impression on me never to be forgot.

"And you have not spoken to her since?" she said, in what I thought was a somewhat disappointed tone.

"I have not," quoth I, gravely. "I am sure your ladyship would not approve of my holding conversation with your ladyship's maid."

"Oh! of course not. I know you are too high-minded ever to think of such a thing. But really—surely—you and he are so delightfully intimate—has George never spoken to you about her?"

Did she want evidence against him? If so, it amounted to a home thrust which I was justified in parrying somehow—anyhow.

"If he had, madam, I should certainly have stopped his talking on such an undesirable subject."

"Then you consider her an undesirable person?"

"Madam"—I tried to laugh—"what possible judge am I, an obscure, lame scholar, of the desirableness or otherwise of French lady's-maids? The fact that she is, and remains, in your service is sufficient guarantee of her—shall I say—respectability?"

Here, I flattered myself, was a home thrust from the other side. Her Magnificence found it so, I think, for her colour rose slightly. I went on—

"This I can say positively, that, as far as I have seen, Lord Hartover has never had any intercourse with her since I have been in this house."

Which was the fact—with a difference.

Digitized by Google

"But you know, of course, that he used to do so often—too often—before you came, poor boy?"

Taking truth for granted thus, is a very formidable method of attack. I felt at my wits' end.

"My lady, I made it a rule when I entered this house never to inquire about what had, or had not, happened before I came here. I held myself responsible only for what took place under my tutorship. I felt—I am sure that you will see that I am right—that my only way of making Lord Hartover trust me, was to begin with him as one who knew nothing about him, to take him simply as I found him. Whether my method has succeeded in improving him you are the best judge."

"Yes, perfectly, perfectly. What could have done better? But—I am sure I must have tired you."

"Oh, madam—as if such a thing was possible. Especially after all your kindness."

"You have more than repaid it. Really you have taken an immense load off my mind, and I shall go downstairs a happier woman. Poor dear George—what do we not owe to you? Of course, this conversation is a secret between us."

"My dear lady," I said, trying to rise, and falling back into my chair in the effort, "after you have honoured me with your confidence, as you have done today, I were base indeed——"

Having beaten off the enemy, I could afford to be generous.

"Well, well," she said, smiling exquisitely as ever. "Adieu, and thanks. Now mind, dear Mr. Brown-

Digitized by Google

low, whatever you want, ask for. And if they are not attentive to you, let me know instantly, or I shall be quite angry and hurt."

With that she swept out of the room. I breathed more freely as she went.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII

THAT interview left me with very mixed feelings. On the one hand was the promise of security for my own future. The burden of poverty was lifted off me. I could work without anxiety as to ways and means, and take, as I believed, a high degree. In all probability a fellowship would follow; then some pleasant country rectory—a home—the first home I should have known since childhood. I was tired, my reason less active than my imagination, I let it run to vague sweet fancies; but drew myself up short. For, on the other hand, there was the threatened parting with Hartover. It would not, could not, be for his good. Ought I to protest further, get others to protest? I remembered my conversation with Lord —— in the library, that afternoon last summer; and his permission to ask his advice should occasion arise. Was this the occasion?

But if the boy himself wished it? After all it was natural enough. For whom has not a uniform charms at eighteen years old? It had for me at that age, I knew, and had brought home to me the cruel loss and disability of my lameness more than aught else. Playing at soldiers, as most played in those days, is a pretty and harmless amusement. It gives a sense of power without the trouble of using it. Why should not the dear boy like to be an officer in

Digitized by Google

the Life Guards? He would make such a handsome one too! I should take pride—so wrapped up in him was I—in his plume and cuirass, and fine charger. How well he would sit his horse! And then a pang of jealousy shot through me, remembering that he had never told me of his wish to go into the army. It was very odd. For what did he not tell me? Why conceal so natural a desire? Was he ashamed of it, fancying I wanted to make a statesman of him?

I would ask him and at once. I could not bear—so bewitched was I—the thought of his having any confidant but myself.

I put the question to him that very afternoon, in my impatience, as we were reading Plutarch—something about Epaminondas or another of those old fighting worthies—"Did he mean to be such a man as that when he went into the army?"

"Into the army?" and he gave a start of evident surprise.

"Why you are going immediately, I hear, into the Life Guards?"

"Not that I know of," said he sturdily.

"I thought—I thought"—I could not conceal my triumph—"that you would have told me yourself."

"Of course I should; whom else? What is this invention? Who has set this story afloat? Two or three years ago, there was some talk of my being a soldier; but I had forgot all about it.—And since—since you came, all is changed. I do not want to be a soldier. I am not a fool to be dazzled by a red coat and gold lace."

Digitized by Google

"My dear boy, all I know is, that it is your father's intention you should go into the Guards this spring."

"I don't care what he intends. I won't go. I cannot go."

And he got up, and walked nervously about the room.

"God, but it would be dreadful—just now, as I was beginning to have hope. I shall be ruined if I leave her——"

"Her?" I cried, in sharp anxiety and fear. But he went on, hardly heeding me.

"Just as I was beginning to feel that I could do anything for her sake—give up anything. That the thought of her, and her beautiful, pure wise face, would bring me safe through any temptation——"

"Good Heavens, whom are you talking of? Fédore?"

I recollected, trembling, his angry assertion of Fédore's purity.

"Fédore? Pish!—I have forgotten her and all about her. Fédore—no—no—Nellie—Miss Braithwaite. I tell you, old man, ever since we met her in the lane that day—you remember when she held open the field gate for the sheep?—and I looked into her sweet wise face—and so beautiful, too—there's no face in the world like it—I felt as if a new life had begun. No—that's not quite true, though. I was struck, I admired her; but I didn't feel that at first. It grew upon me"—his eyes were alight, his countenance transfigured by a dawning of very noble pas-

Digitized by Google

sion—" It grew upon me. If I could have her some day to teach me, to keep me out of what's low and unworthy, like some good spirit, some guardian angel —I could wait—wait—serve for her for seven years, as Jacob served for Rachel in the Bible. I would read, I would learn, I would make myself a great name—anything, no matter how hard, anything to be worthy of and to win her.—Why, my dear old man," he broke off abruptly, " what on earth is the matter with you? "

For I lay back in my chair deadly pale. Alas! was this to be the end of all those dreams which I had never confessed, even to myself? Indeed I had never understood till that hour how I loved Nellie Braithwaite. Never understood, purblind fool that I was, the charm of Mere Ban, which drew me back there again and again, consisted, not in talks concerning politics, social and economic questions, projects of reform, or schemes for the elevation of the masses—though these no doubt had their value—but in something quite else; not in the father's appeal to my intellect, in short, but in the daughter's empire over my heart.

Every word which Hartover said of himself, his own feelings, his own hopes and purposes, was true of mine likewise. A hundred times more true; for what would it cost him to win her in comparison with what it would cost me? I, at the bottom of the steep ladder of fame, with all the weary climb before me. He, darling alike of Nature and Fortune, more than half-way up the ladder already, nineteen-twentieths

Digitized by Google

of his work done for him, ready to his hand. And a storm of envy, of wicked rage swept over me. He to talk of labour, of sacrifices! The rich man, taking credit to himself for sparing his own flocks and herds, while he snatched away the poor man's one ewe lamb. Oh! these great folks, these great folks, from childhood to old age they all are the same. They fancy the whole world is made for their profit or pastime; and stalk on in their arrogant pride, like giants, heedless that their every step crushes a thousand living creatures, to whom life is as sweet as to themselves, suffering as cruel, death as blank!

I had shut my eyes—perhaps to keep back the burning tears. I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"Dearest old man, you are ill! I have talked too much to you about my own selfish concerns——"

I looked up and met his eyes, fixed on mine with such loving earnestness that I was melted at once. In God's name, who was I, to stand between him and his happiness? What told me I had been sent into the world to be happy? Not my club foot in good truth. But all I could bring out was—

"Yes, I am a good deal shaken by yesterday; only—thank God, it is not Fédore!"

"No," he said eagerly, smiling, but blushing scarlet withal. "I was very foolish about Fédore once—and I should have behaved very ill—basely—to her, if she would have let me; but she would not. And then you came. You taught me to love purity, simplicity, usefulness, nobleness, wherever I saw them; and I saw them in Nellie Braithwaite. I loved

Digitized by Google

them there. You taught me to love her!" And he smiled winningly in my face. "And so you must help me to win her. You will—I am sure you will"—and he took both my hands in his—"I have no one to help me but you, you know."

A shudder passed through me. I saw the danger of my position—the practical difficulties, the immense social unfitness of such a marriage. I knew his pursuing it might cost him many thousands a year; for Lord Longmoor, whose religion was very certainly not of a democratic type, would undoubtedly refuse his consent. This however was the last objection I dare raise to a high-minded boy, like Hartover, in his present temper. Besides what objection of any description could come fittingly from my lips? Was not my happiness bound up in the destruction of his? Could I, in honour, interfere where all I might do would secretly be done on my own behalf? His loss was all too clearly my gain. Still I was equally in honour bound to prevent his angering his father; bound to prevent his losing—as he assuredly would lose—the bulk of his fortune. A thought moreover of my own interest occurred to me. What if I should be discovered in abetting his infatuation, expelled the house—ruined—for nothing short of ruin would it spell? But when that last thought crossed my mind, I flung it from me. To dissuade him from such a marriage that I might step in myself was ignoble enough. But to dissuade him from it to save my own pocket was doubly ignoble. And yet I could not nerve myself to a definite answer.

Digitized by Google

"So you won't help me," he said at last, relinquishing my hands. "You are afraid of my father, like the rest."

"Unjust," I cried. "I am afraid of nothing but doing wrong by you. Tell me"—for a point presented itself with which I was glad to turn the conversation—"have you—have you spoken to her about this?"

I waited, trembling, to hear my own fate.

"No—yes—once, that is——"

"And tell me—you must tell me—what she answered?"

He gave a proud laugh.

"She was so angry; and looked so splendid when she was angry. Said I was making game of her, forsooth! But I soon let her know I was in earnest, and then she was angrier still. And that made me love her all the more—to have the spirit to refuse *me!* Yes, I love her all the more for it. But she's not going to escape me so easily, I can tell her. I mean to have her, and, by God, have her I will. And have her, I think I can, eh! dear old man? I don't go to her quite empty-handed, after all, you know."

And he looked askance, into the mirror over the chimney-piece, at his own fair head. Have her? Of course he could; or any other woman whom he chose.

My heart sank within me. There was no hope for me. The bull was brought to the stake and must abide the baiting. Still I must gain a little respite.

"My dear boy," I told him, "this is a matter not to be settled in an hour or a day. We must go slow

Digitized by Google

about it. But this I tell you. When all is said and done you are dearer to me "—I paused a moment to confirm my own resolution—" dearer to me than anyone living. And you I will think for, you I will work for whatever betide, in life and in death."

" I knew you would! " he cried triumphantly, interpreting in his own sense words which were purposely ambiguous, yet most earnest and true.—" What's that noise? "

And darting away from me across the room, he flung the door—which somehow, it appeared, had come ajar—wide open, to discover, crouching down outside it, no less a person than Mr. Halidane.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX

An ugly scene followed. Violent, even brutal, on the one part, abject yet tricky on the other, it reflected small enough credit on either. Had it not proved the pivot upon which subsequent events turned, I would willingly leave it unrecorded.

Fearing what might happen, I sprang to my feet, crippled though I was. But long before I could reach him, I saw Hartover strike the man in the face with a crack like a pistol shot, which, I own, made me shudder all over; seize him by the collar, and, dragging him forward, hurl him into the middle of the room, shutting and locking the door behind him.

In vain I implored the boy to restrain himself. Inflamed by—not wholly unrighteous—indignation, and by the desire of revenge, seeing too his romance profaned, made common and vulgar, the young barbarian, not to say young wild beast, broke loose in Hartover. He had a long score to settle with Halidane and proceeded to settle it in a primitive manner. Anger in his case was, unfortunately, not inarticulate. He let fly with tongue as well as with fists.

"Sneak, scoundrel," he thundered—"you dirty hypocrite. Gad, I'll punish you—I'll punish you. Always making mischief between me and my father—setting him against me.—Take that—and that—

Digitized by Google

and that, sir.—Always getting money out of him, too, and robbing me—yes, robbing me to feed a crew of slavering rascals like yourself, who are too lazy to do an honest day's work as long as they can live at free quarters, sing hymns out of tune and miaul prayers they don't believe in. I'll answer your prayers, for once, as they deserve to be answered. Take that, I tell you. And now, what have you heard, you dirty spy—what have you heard, I say? If you don't want to be pounded any more, answer me."

Mr. Halidane was considerably taller and heavier than the boy, and should have been more than his equal in fighting capacity. But soft living and neglect of exercise had made him squashy—"of the consistence of an underdone sausage" as the boy put it naughtily. He had been taken wholly by surprise, moreover, and appeared rather contemptibly helpless under the lad's furious onslaught. It was not until I managed to throw myself between him and his assailant, that he gathered voice or courage enough to reply.

"The saints do not strive or cry, my lord," he panted, "or return blow for blow! But I would have you remember they are bidden to be prudent and watchful, not slothful in business or in the reproof of sinners—knowing that vengeance is the divine prerogative, and that He will repay, my lord," he added viciously. "Oh dear, yes—for His saints who humbly trust in Him—not a doubt about it, He will repay."

Digitized by Google

"Which means," the boy cried scornfully, "that not having the pluck to be a ruffian you're only a rogue. I congratulate you. It forwards the cause of religion, doesn't it? Makes religion so attractive. And now, once again, Mr. Rogue, what have you overheard, I say?"

"What I have had to endure is the first question, my lord. I came here, by her ladyship's commands, to commune with Mr. Brownlow as one Christian brother—if I can any longer apply that sweet term to him—with another, about matters relating to the family. In return, I am attacked, struck, grossly ill-used and insulted by the pupil whom he prides himself upon having instructed in the loftiest principles of heathen—and unregenerate—virtue. The result of such instructions are, I think, manifest. I behold their fallen fruits!"

I felt almost inclined to laugh, in spite of my very real alarm and dismay. For the fallen fruits, in as far as they were visible, consisted of a purple stream—juice not of the grape—descending over Mr. Halidane's white shirt front, which he essayed unsuccessfully to staunch with a scarlet and green silk pocket-handkerchief. Still I answered, courteously and ceremoniously, that I was extremely shocked and grieved by so unfortunate a mistake, so unseemly an occurrence—that it was immensely to be regretted Mr. Halidane's position should have appeared equivocal—and so forth, smoothing matters to the best of my ability.

But the boy burst in again.

Digitized by Google

"What have you heard? I've given you one licking and, as I live, I'll give you another, and another after that."

In vain I entreated for peace. His attitude remained threatening, while Halidane seemed slowly making up his mind to give way and speak.

"Lord Hartover," he said at length, with a singular mixture of truculence and cringing, "I think, as a Christian, I should return good for evil, and tell you plainly what—oh! with such pain!—I most unwillingly listened to, so that you may see how cruelly unfounded are your charges against me. I heard you, my lord, confess to having indulged a guilty passion for your step-mother's maid. Of that, however, I was, I grieve to say, only too well aware already—as, I have reason to believe, was this gentleman also. I heard you then confess your intention of marrying a farmer's daughter, in spite of whatever opposition your poor sainted father might offer—a young woman, I may add, indoctrinated with revolutionary ideas, which must be abhorrent to every right-minded, God-fearing person. And lastly, to my astonishment and horror, I heard this gentleman promise you his full aid and assistance in the prosecution of that most undutiful and even wicked project."

This last was a rank falsehood; but I would not say so before Hartover. No—I was embarked fairly with him now. If I let him believe that I was going to cast him off at such a crisis, what might not happen? I would take my venture with him, and

Digitized by Google

try to save him if I could. As for the other two counts, they were near enough to the truth to be made to do truth's work. Well—was not that all the more reason for standing by the boy in his extremity? He remained silent, choking with rage, but aware of his danger.

"And now, my lord, having clearly put before you our relative positions"—saying this, in a smooth voice, there was an evil look in his eye—"I think I may be permitted to wish your lordship a good afternoon. Mr. Brownlow, you will be my witness that throughout this painful interview I have at no time been wanting in the respect due to Lord Hartover's superior station."

For which speech I longed to kick him. That which I longed to do, my pupil seemed about to do.

"Yes, you may go; but not through the door," he said. "The window is at your service, sir. Oblige me by leaving that way. You won't? Very good, then I'll make you."

And before I could intervene, he snatched a rapier down from the wall and began forcing his victim back with the point towards the window.

"Here goes—a serpent must do for a dragon for once. You're the serpent, and I stand for St. George."

Halidane, with the cold steel playing about his ribs, utterly unmanned, howled aloud to me for protection. I threw my arms round the boy, and quieted him sufficiently to get the key from his pocket and

Digitized by Google

thus enable the wretched man to escape. Then I threw myself back into a chair, exhausted.

I passed a very miserable half-hour after that, and a humiliating one. The good work of months seemed to be undone; the self-control, which I had spent so many anxious hours in instilling, to be swept away. For the time being the boy was, to all practical intents and purposes, mad. He raved, he swore, he made wild plans. The villain had gone to tell his father; but he would not see his father. He would leave the house that moment. He would go down to Mr. Braithwaite and have it out with him. He would take a farm. He would enlist as a private soldier. He would go as a huntsman to hounds. He would do anything, everything. At last he raved himself thirsty, and rang the bell. William, who had I found been waiting outside, in terror, entered instantly.

"Drink, he must have drink! Some brandy. No. Champagne—that would keep his spirits up. Go to Marsigli, and tell him to send it. Curse them! He was heir to Hover yet, he would make somebody at least obey him!"

I was in despair. If drinking began again, all was indeed lost; and, before I fully realised what I was doing, I found myself upon my knees before him.

"Not that, dearest boy! Anything but that! Things are bad enough already. Do not make them worse by destroying your reason, when you never had more need of it. William, if you bring it—I will never forgive you."

Digitized by Google

"Please not, my lord," echoed William.

"Lord Hartover, I do not rise, or let you go, till you promise me not to send for any liquor——"

He struggled so violently to get away from me, that he threw me against a table. Bruised as I was, every touch hurt me, and I uttered a cry of pain. This brought him to himself.

He burst into a violent flood of tears, lifted me up tenderly, and helped me to a chair entreating pardon.

"I do need my reason indeed; but I have none left. Help me with yours. What shall I do?"

"Try at least to be calm," I said.

"But I cannot. I will leave this house. I cannot face the insults which I know are coming."

"Your father will never insult you."

"How do you know that, Brownlow? And if he does not, he will let that Halidane insult me—set him on to do it—and to insult you, too. Oh, my dear old man, what have I done? I have ruined you."

"Who can tell?" I said. I had not yet made up my mind what course I should pursue, if—as was most probable—I lost my position.—What matter? God would provide. "But as for leaving this house, you must not."

"I must."

"If your lordship goes I go with you, to the world's end," quoth William.

"You must neither of you go. I will never give my consent, never."

"Why?"

Digitized by Google

"Because it would be wrong. No son has a right, under age as you are, to run away from his father's house. Still less before you have faced the worst. You cannot tell what turn events may take. The whole storm may blow over, for aught we know. And then how ashamed you would be at having been conquered by fear!"

"Fear?" he repeated scornfully.

"Yes, fear. To be afraid of being insulted is every bit as cowardly as being afraid of being wounded, or of suffering any other bodily pain or shock."

"But my honour?"

"A man's duty is his honour, whatever else is not. Do your duty, and your honour will take care of itself. And your duty, to-day, is to remain here and listen, like a good son, to whatever your father has to say to you."

"Please, gentlemen—my lord," William put in, "why not send for the colonel and tell him the whole story?"

"Why not?" I said. "Excellent advice. Let us lay the matter before him at once."

My reasons for this step were threefold. Colonel Esdaile would approach the matter as a man of the world. His verdict would, to some extent, relieve me of responsibility, and I was near the end of my powers. I sorely needed relief. And, thirdly, I knew for a fact that he was no friend to Halidane. What influence he possessed he would use, I believed, on the boy's behalf.

Digitized by Google

I said something to this effect. Hartover looked shrewdly at me.

"Will he? I'm not altogether so sure of that. You don't quite measure the Rusher yet, old man. He's his own book to make, the old fox; and it all depends whether my book suits his."

And he stood thinking, his face serious, his brows knit.

I could not but think, too, for his words disheartened me, recalling my earlier uneasy sense of the conflicting wills, the conflicting interests, intrigue and possible treachery, which lay below the fair seeming of these fine people and the life of this great house. Lady Longmoor had hinted at it. The boy hinted at it. Halidane had confirmed those hints at a particularly low level. But what of the higher level—did falsehood, self-seeking, scheming reign there equally? Colonel Esdaile stood next in the succession, since Lady Longmoor was childless. It was to his interest, then, that Hartover should not marry at all. True—but the chances of his remaining unmarried were so remote, that it might suit the colonel better to help forward a match of which Lord Longmoor disapproved. If the latter disinherited his son, he—the colonel—might secure a share of the plunder. Why I knew not, but my heart often misgave me that if the earl's innumerable imaginary ailments developed into one real ailment—a thing very possible—if, to be plain, he succeeded, and those about him succeeded in coddling him to death, within as short a time as the decencies of mourning permitted

Digitized by Google

I should see Colonel Esdaile her ladyship's husband. What was their relation to one another now? Gossip, I could not but be aware, had long been busy. Yet my recent conversation with her—her confidences, all she had so touchingly told me—what did these mean? I recoiled in horror, for was I not groping along the edge of a moral abyss compared with which my groping along the edge of that natural abyss, in the darkness of the limestone cavern, two nights ago, became a thing of small moment. Heavens! what a hateful disgusting web it all was for me to have to soil my hands in disentangling. Oh! for my quiet college rooms again, grand old books, and peace.

But the boy was there in utter need, all this while, and something must be done at once. Whatever his ulterior hopes and purposes, there could be no question of the colonel's dislike of Halidane. No question, either, that Halidane was struggling, whether for himself or his clique, to secure a share of that aforementioned plunder. At this juncture the two plunderers' interest could not run on all fours—therefore I would chance it.

"William is right," I said at last. "We will go and talk things over with the colonel."

I forgot I could not walk. The boy would not leave me. He all but clung to me. William must be our messenger.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XX

As soon as we were alone Hartover crossed the room, and threw open a casement of one of the long low diamond-paned windows; thereby letting in the chill air drawing down from the distant fells. Letting in, too, the song of the northerly wind among the giant firs—a sad but very noble melody. Dishevelled, his raiment disordered by stress of battle, he stood in his smart high-waisted blue coat, his hands thrust in his breeches pockets, leaning his flushed cheek against the stone mullion, and gazing over gardens, pinery, and stately avenue to where the upward rolling wilderness of rusty indigo moor rose against the quiet sky. He was quite gentle now, subdued and wistful, wearied by the violence of his own passion; and—beautiful exceedingly, as I could not but note. That anyone should have the heart to plot against or strive to injure him, to traffic with his faults or weaknesses to their own advantage, appeared to me past belief. And it seemed these thoughts of mine must have communicated themselves to him, in some way, passing into his mind, for he presently said—

"Why, why can't they be kind to me? Or if that's expecting too much, why can't they let me alone? I don't want to be a blackguard. By Heaven, I could be good, should be good, if only they treated me

Digitized by Google

fairly, didn't lay traps for and badger me. Upon my soul, it's as if they wished me to go to the devil and to do wrong. Honestly, I never had a dog's chance till you came, Brownlow. If I'm the young limb of Satan they make me out to be, why do they take so much trouble about keeping me here? Why can't they let me clear out—go away with you, dear old man, and get something to do? After all I've my mother's money, you know. They could hardly take that from me. I don't know exactly how much it is, only a couple of thousand or so a year. But I could manage to scrape along on that for a time, I suppose, until——"

Here Colonel Esdaile swaggered in, genial and laughing, saving me, to my thankfulness, the necessity to reply.

"Well, George, so I hear you've a good day's work to your credit," he began. "I hope you gave his oily reverence a thorough dressing down while you were about it."

"I wish I had killed him," the boy broke out, firing up again.

"There are little inconveniences about a charge of assault and battery when it ends in the demise of the battered one, I'm afraid. Still I doubt if I should have given my tailor orders for a band of crape on my sleeve. The fellow got no more than he deserves in my opinion. So my verdict on your conduct is pretty much that of the Irish Bar, when a certain member of it knocked a certain counsellor down in the Town Courts—namely that 'nothing could be

Digitized by Google

more reprehensible than Mr. O'Blank's conduct in knocking the counsellor down, except Mr. O'Blank's conduct in letting him get up again.' And that, I fancy, will be the verdict of everyone—but your father, who—who don't count."

"I wish I could think he did not, Colonel," said I.

"Oh! I'll see things are made all right in that quarter," he declared lightly. "But now, as to this young lady, George, who is the only really important part of the matter."

"Who told you there was a young lady?" Hartover asked simply.

"Well I might have guessed it, old fellow. When men of your age do anything particularly desperate, there is sure to be a petticoat in the case. But, to tell the truth, I was in my lady's boudoir when the parson entered."

"What? Did he not go to my father?"

"Your father was just having his throat rubbed, I understand, with some new quack's Vital Elixir, before driving out in the cold wind, and could not be disturbed. And now he is gone out; so that if we could smother the black fellow in the meantime, all might be well yet."

"And what did she say?"

"Oh, she? She went into hysterics at the sight of the wounded hero, and became thereby incompetent to offer an opinion on the subject."

"Rusher!" said the boy fiercely, "you're chaffing me. You don't intend to help me."

"Not to marry that young lady, Hartover," he

Digitized by Google

said with a complete change of tone. "I know she is very lovely, and I daresay she is very good and clever, and all that; and I don't think the least the worse of you for falling in love with her. As if a man cannot have a passion or two before he's twenty-one! But as for marrying her, that will never do; and I am sure Brownlow here, who is a sensible man if ever there was one, feels the same."

I was thankful the boy was too absorbed by his own emotion to observe the shrug and glance which passed between us. Sincerely, without reference to any stake of my own in the issue, I agreed with the speaker. The idea of such a marriage, as matters now stood, could not be entertained. Yet how was I to tell Hartover so? Still more, how convince him such a view was the only reasonable and prudent one?

And here the poor boy broke out with a string of those pathetic and time-honoured commonplaces which each generation repeats in youth and smiles at in maturity. The colonel sat by, listening amusedly; until, at last, out of good-nature—perhaps out of boredom, too—he rose and, patting the boy on the shoulder, spoke soothingly. "Leave it all to him, and he would see what could be done—would go down and talk it all over with my lady. Hartover might count on him to stand by him"—and so forth, promising recklessly all I dared not promise, because I was in earnest while he was not. I could see he treated the whole affair as a lad's passing fancy, which had best be humoured, because, if

Digitized by Google

humoured, it would in all probability be forgotten in a few months' time. I began to wonder whether he might not be right. His experience was larger than mine, and I ended by blaming myself for having taken the matter so seriously; selfishly hoping, in my heart of hearts, that the colonel had gauged the position more truly than I myself had.

He departed, leaving us, save for soothing phrases, pretty much where we were before his coming.

The boy looked at the fine swaggering figure as it passed out on to the stair, and said quietly—

"The Rusher is a humbug. He means what he says, now, perhaps; but he won't do it. He won't take the trouble when it comes to the point, or he'll get talked over. You see if he doesn't. I must just help myself—so—good-bye, old man, for the present."

"Good-bye?"

"Yes—I'm going out, and without your leave—mind that. My hat and coat, William. And, William——"

"Yes, my lord," and the faithful spaniel came.

"Look here—I'm going out without Mr. Brownlow's permission and against his will, and he doesn't know where I am going to."

William looked at me inquiringly.

"It is too true. For Heaven's sake tell me what you are about? What is the meaning of this? You will not——"

"Not run away, I promise you. I shall be back in a couple of hours. You can't catch me, you know,

Digitized by Google

old fellow; and if you try I'll serve you as I did Halidane."

He went, forcing a laugh; returned according to promise, though in somewhat over the two hours, was very silent during dinner, and as soon as it was finished got up from the table.

"I am tired, dear old man," he said. "Do you mind if I turn in early to-night? I want a good sleep."

At the door he paused, came back and putting his two hands on my shoulders stood looking down in my face.

"She—Nellie—loves me, though she has refused me," he said, and his lips quivered. "Never mind how, but I've found that out. Now I don't care a hang what they do or say. I shall never give her up."

Mr. Marsigli appeared, grave and courtly, "His lordship desired to speak with Lord Hartover at once."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXI

I HAD passed an agitated day, followed by a sleepless night. Rising early, stiff and crippled though I still was, I hobbled down the winding stairs, out across the terrace and gardens to the great square of stable buildings. I had taken much the same journey on my first morning at Hover, nearly two years before, in all the charm and radiance of May. This was to be, as I had determined, my last morning there. A very different scene, different sentiments and circumstances; alas for the vanity of human hopes and human wishes!

Hartover's interview with his father had been stormy; the "sainted" nobleman's form of piety by no means excluding strong feeling or strong language in the expression of it—upon occasion. But the main offence, in all this wretched business, was, I learned, credited to my account. The trouble took its rise in my detestable association with Mr. Braithwaite—whose political opinions stank in the aristocratic nostrils, and of whose daughter's marriage to Hartover I was reported an earnest advocate. I could have laughed at the irony of my own position; and could easily, as I thought, see whom I had to thank for it. I found it less easy to decide on the course of action duty commanded me to adopt.

During the course of the day I had requested, even

Digitized by Google

demanded, an interview with Lord Longmoor, so that I might lay my own account of affairs before him. I met with a refusal. It could not be arranged. He was too worried, too upset by all which had occurred. His health made it imperative that he should be spared further discussion and annoyance. So I was condemned unheard, notwithstanding Hartover's entreaties and protests. For the dear boy, I believe, fought my battle bravely, taking all blame upon himself, controlling both tongue and temper lest he should injure my cause by violent or impertinent speech.

I waited until evening before coming to a final decision, for I did not want to act in anger or in pique. Then I wrote to Lord Longmoor, resigning my position as tutor to his son. It was a heavy wrench—but the heavier the wrench the more clear the duty. Looking back, I still think I did right.

Warcop had been my first friend at Hover, and to him I turned in my present distress.

The day had not fairly broken yet. The morning mist hung thick. In it grooms and helpers, but half clothed and half awake, moved to and fro about the stable-yard armed with pitchforks or buckets, calling to one another, whistling, their stunted, crab-legged forms the more ungainly from the trusses of straw and hay borne on their backs. Even before I could distinguish him, I recognised Warcop's voice, rasping and surly, admonishing his subordinates as "lazy towlers and tykes" in the broadest of his Yorkshire speech.

Digitized by Google

Seeing me, he held out his hand in silence. I grasped it, with a singular sense of support, even of comfort—for I was shaken by the events of the last three days, and by my sleepless night. I followed him into his *sanctum*—a queer dusky office, hung round with prints and spoils of the stud-farm and the chase, furnished with shelves, too, containing a miscellaneous assortment of professional stores and appliances—which, although in fact scrupulously clean, smelt, I must own, very vilely of horse-medicines, leather, grease, tobacco-smoke, and Heaven knows what besides. The stove was alight. He brought forward a Windsor arm-chair, and bade me sit down near it.

"For 'tis chill," he said, "an ye're no too grand on your legs yet. But I kenned you coom, sir, gin you could walk, so bid to make t' fire 'oop. Seeing it were best, an' coom you could, we should ha' our crack here than i' the house—for 'odds, sir, walls have ears at Hover, if ears walls ever had."

"Too true, Warcop," I answered, sadly enough. "So you have heard what has happened?"

"And more than's happened, as like as not."

"Most probably," I said.

"And the upshot of it a' is ye leave Hover?"

"How can I do otherwise? My presence here can only increase the breach between Lord Hartover and his father, as long as the earl believes I encourage the boy in his affection for Miss Braithwaite. I can only give you my word that, until the day before yesterday, when Lord Hartover spoke to me about

Digitized by Google

the matter himself, I had not the faintest suspicion he had ever given the young lady a thought."

"Better give her a thought than some nearer home," quoth Warcop. "But t' story goes the lass has been setting her cap at him these three months past."

"Then the story is a very wicked lie," I answered. "I have been with him constantly, and I know that, at most, he has spoken to her thrice. Who has dared to set that rumour afloat? I advise them to have a care, for if Lord Hartover hears of it they will assuredly meet with the same fate at his hands as Mr. Halidane did two days ago."

Warcop chuckled.

"'Deed, but t' lad put up a bonny fight!" he said with evident relish. "An' that's to your credit, sir, for ye've kept him fra t' drink, kept him clean body an' sowl, and gotten far to make a man o' him—God bless you for it, an' He will. But it's sair news ye're leaving us, for t' lad's young in clean ways yet. Can ye trust him to stan' alone? Trust him, an' ye're gone, to keep straight?"

"I don't know, I don't know," I cried, putting my hands over my face. "There you touch me home, Warcop. That's where the whole thing cuts me. Still I only forestall our parting by a few months, for her ladyship tells me he is to join the Life Guards next spring in any case. Lord Longmoor had already determined he should do so, and this unfortunate business will assuredly make him more resolute the boy should leave home than ever."

Digitized by Google

Warcop remained silent for a good couple of minutes. He screwed up his mouth, scratched his head.

"I've tried an' I've tried," he said at last; "an' it beats me. I can't fathom it. Between puking fools and canting knaves, and fly-by-night wantons and rakes, what is't they want to do wi' t' lad?"

I started; for had I not asked myself just that question, though in less unvarnished language, a hundred times? Had not Hartover, indeed, asked it himself?

"Is it that you cannot, or that you will not, fathom it, Warcop?" I said, scenting his Yorkshire caution and trying to bring him to the point. For I felt if any man living could explain the ugly problem he could.

"Nay, nay," he answered, looking me full in the face. "I'd tell ye, gin I kenned myself, fast enough, an' it would help you or t' lad. But I dinna, sir, though most ungodly fears ha' crossed my mind. But this I can tell ye, there's some new game up betwixt Mamzell and Mr. Marsigli, ever since my lady had them both up to town wi' her last Whitsun. By times they're as thick as thieves"—he dwelt on the last word meaningly. "By times they fight like cat and dog, or"—he glanced at me—"like man and wife, sir."

I pressed him to be explicit; and he told me that in his opinion Marsigli had some hold over Mademoiselle Fédore, against which she rebelled. It was she who had put about the evil story concerning Nellie Braithwaite's efforts to entrap Hartover. Did

Digitized by Google

she intend to make her profit out of the business, and did Marsigli stand in the way of her carrying out that intention? A violent quarrel had taken place between the couple, upon whom Warcop had come, unexpectedly, in one of the shrubberies near the stables in the dusk last evening. It had gone forward in mixed French and Italian, so that he could gather little of the actual subject under discussion; but Hartover's name had occurred, and so had mine.

"An' the French she-devil flounced off in a fine taking, an' cannoned right into me round t' corner o' a yew hedge, which sobered her a bit, I promise you," Warcop added, with a chuckle.

But time pressed. I dared not linger. The mail stopped at the Longmoor Hunt Inn at ten o'clock, and I had to make my final preparations before getting Warcop to drive me there to meet it. For I had settled to go straight back to Cambridge and talk over everything—save one thing which should lie secret in my own heart—with the kind old Master and ask his advice. I had spent but little of my salary, and had more than enough in hand to supply all my simple wants until I could find work. Yet the future, I confess, looked very black. My hopes were dashed, my promised security had vanished. In leaving Hover I left, not only comfort, many interests and pleasures, a spacious and stately way of life, but the human beings who were dearest to me on earth. I dared not dwell upon that, lest it should unman me completely. I must cut my farewells as short as possible. To Hartover I represented our separation as

Digitized by Google

temporary—a fiction, as I knew, but a pardonable one under the circumstances.

He wanted, dear boy, to drive me to the little country town and see me off. But I implored him to spare both himself and me this added wretchedness. Let me go quietly, alone with Warcop. Let there be no demonstration, no fuss. All that he said to me, in his loving generous way, I remember and always shall remember. Undeserved, exaggerated though I knew it to be, it went far to sweeten my very bitter cup. He broke down utterly at last, flung his arms round me and cried upon my breast, promising me, like a child, that he "would be good," be good, forsooth, until I came back.

And I left him in the study, where we had spent so many and such varied hours together—and thus, in disappointment and apparent failure, closed that eventful section of my life.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXII

AND now I was safe back at Cambridge again. Safe in my own old rooms, among my old friends, welcomed with open arms by the good Master and Fellows. To the Master I told my tale, both of success and failure—only not mentioning my own affair of the heart. That was my private joy, my private sorrow, to be told to no man, no counseller, however benevolent and sympathetic. And both sympathetic and benevolent the dear old Master proved himself. He made arrangements by which all College fees were lessened, and—out of his own pocket—paid certain charges, so that I need make but slight inroad upon my little capital. I was touched and astonished by his generosity and the affection he showed me. Had I been his son, he could hardly have taken warmer interest in my well-being.

But if I was astonished by the Master's generosity, I was still more astonished by a letter which reached me ere the week was out from none other than Lady Longmoor herself.

She was "*toute éplorée,*" she wrote, "at my departure, but admired me for it. It was just like me, acting from too high a sense of honour. She knew it was hopeless to ask me to return."

Why not try, whether hopeless or not, by experiment—I thought.

Digitized by Google

"Perhaps while his lordship was still under the influence of recent painful scenes I had better not return. All she and her dear George could do was to show their gratitude to me in a practical way for the many" etc., etc. And there was a cheque for my salary to the year's end and a hundred pounds more. I was to "draw on Lord Longmoor's bankers for a hundred each year until I left Cambridge. This was her dear George's plan, so I need feel no hesitation in accepting it. He insisted on my going back to College——"

I pondered long over this letter. It had evidently been composed with great care; and though here and there a word was, of course, misspelt, it was a far more brilliant specimen of English prose than I had ever before seen from the same hand. What time and trouble it must have cost the poor lady, thought I! Plainly she considered herself a little in my power, and was willing to keep on good terms with me.

But my surprise knew no bounds when I came to this postscript:—"I may tell you in confidence that I have called at Mere Ban and seen the lovely shepherdess. Such a beauty! Such grace! Such simplicity! Such sensibility! When I looked at her how could I but sympathise"—this word she had much deformed—"with dearest Hartover! What would I not do to help him? We must trust that all will turn out well yet. At least, whatever happens, we know that he has a friend in you."

Digitized by Google

Doubtless—but what could have induced her to look favourably on a marriage between her stepson and Nellie? I puzzled my poor brains over this extraordinary development for many days, but found myself no nearer to a rational solution than when I started. However, I knew enough of the fair siren, by now, to be suspicious of her enthusiasm and encouragement and, muttering to myself, "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*," I left honest time to unravel the mystery.

And so I settled back into the University routine. Sat in the same lecture-rooms, contended with the same problems, took my constitutional along the same Wrangler's Walk, or watched the moonlight shadows among the same noble elms, trying to forget the experiences of the last two years and take up college life again where I had left it. Impossible. In those two years of actual time I had grown ten years older. I had gone out a simple lad. I had come back, if not a man of the world, at least a man forced by circumstance into self-resolve and self-restraint; prudence and—shall I say?—cunning. Yes, I had seen the world. And dearly had I bought the sight. The price was that burning fire within, the fire of a hopeless love which consumed me night and day. True, it was hopeless. But there is a love which no more needs hope to feed it than the presence of the beloved one—a love which, self-lighted and inextinguishable, burns on for ever without other fuel than the brain of its victim. Not that I indulged my fancy. Not that I played weakly and luxuriously

Digitized by Google

with any thoughts of what might have been. I thrust them from me sternly, fiercely, and threw myself into my reading, and read, and over-read. It was simply that her face, her voice, her every gesture, never left my imagination—I had almost said, my retina—for one moment of time. During the severest mathematical thought, as during the seemingly soundest sleep, I was always conscious of her. I struggled, I prayed, to put the image away. But when, after many struggles and many prayers, I found that it would not vanish, I let it be. Had God put it there? If so, who was I to fight against God? And, if so, was it not there for a purpose? Was I not doomed thus always to bear her in mind, that I might be of use to her hereafter? That thought sprang up within me and gave me new life. Hitherto I had been reading without any high or even clear purpose, from mere mental activity, emulation, the desire of a fellowship and a competence; but now I began to read for her. I took my degree and a very good one—thank Heaven and my worthy tutors—for her. I went into Holy Orders six months later; and when, within eighteen months of leaving Hover, found myself a Fellow and junior tutor, I had still the paradoxical instinct that, in that capacity, I was working for her of whom I had heard but once since I left the north.

But once;—for, to go back and take things according to the order of time, I received from Braithwaite, within a month of my return to Cambridge, the following letter:—

Digitized by Google

"MY DEAR BROWNLOW,—I am sorry to part with you; but part, I fear, I must. You still belong to that Hartover faction, and must continue to do so. It is your interest to keep well with them; and I happen to know that you stand rather better with them than ever. You went off like a brave lad, as you always were, and I like you for it. So do they; for now they can gallop away to the devil comfortably, without having you to preach to them. Any rational people would have asked you to come back; but Lords and Ladies can't be expected to behave like ordinary sane human beings. Besides, I suppose you have still in your head some fantastical chivalrous notion of saving that poor young fool. He is gone into the Guards, and hence I suppose to the dogs. Anyway, your path and mine lie in opposite directions for my poor Nellie's sake. Don't be angry with me. I've learnt a lot from you, and I flatter myself you've learnt something from me; and, if I could have you without *them,* there is no man on earth I would sooner see at my table. But, as it is, I have thrown up my farm here. Made a capital bargain, too, with the incoming tenant, and am going to farm elsewhere —I won't tell even you where. By the bye, I had an amusing interview with that old ape of an Earl. I got admitted, on his hearing that I wanted to give up the farm; told him plainly that I did not think it good to stay in the neighbourhood after what had happened, at which he vouchsafed to say that I had behaved like a gentleman. But when I let him know—as I took care to do—that I had quite as much objection to his son's marrying my daughter as he himself could have, I 'touched his witness,' as we Quakers used to say, a little too shrewdly and put him into a boiling rage. The miserable lump of pride wanted me, forsooth, to look on it all as a mighty honour, and leave him all the glory of despising me.

Digitized by Google

So I told him it was a strange world where two men must needs quarrel just because they agreed exactly, and bowed myself out.

"God bless you. You will prosper wherever you are, and die a fat pluralist with three livings and a stall. Nellie sends her best love."

Her best love? I knew better. And perhaps he knew better too; but it was a comfort to think that she remembered me kindly.

Then came letters from the dear boy. At first frequent, affectionate, even passionate; always full of Nellie, and tearing my heart-strings thereby. But after a while they grew fewer, and, though by almost imperceptible degrees, colder. What wonder? I saw that his affection for me was dying out before the influx of new scenes, new hopes and pleasures alas! For he was in the Guards now, and in the thickest whirl of London life. At last his letters ceased entirely, and over a year passed without a line. I tried to find out from the Master how he was. But he knew nothing. "Lord Hartover was very much admired, he believed, in society, and very successful." Anything more the good man could not, or would not, tell me.

My heart was very heavy when his letters ceased, for still the boy charmed me. The thought of his beauty, his natural cleverness, the gallant way he had with him, the great destiny to which he was called—could he but meet and rise to it—captivated my imagination. I was jealous of his affection, jealous of his remembrance; and now it seemed he had forgot-

Digitized by Google

ten me and that I had passed altogether out of his life. I could only trust and pray that he had not forgotten all I had taught him likewise; but that some lessons of chivalry, duty, self-respect and self-restraint had sunk deep enough into the foundations of his mind and character to save him from the fate of Alcibiades, which I had always dreaded for him. I, at least, never forgot him. Night and morning, through those lonely waiting years, I prayed for him —and for her whom he loved, though to my own so great discomfiture and loss.

Had he forgotten her too? I wondered. Sometimes I hoped he had; that his was merely a boy's passion which, lightly coming, would also lightly go and leave her free. Free for me? Ah, selfish and disloyal thought! For I was pursued by the belief—though it may seem a far-fetched folly—that in forgetting her he would become a worse and weaker man. That love for her might hold him to one ennobling purpose; while, letting slip that purpose, he might drift down into base promiscuous pleasures, and end, too likely, in some loveless *mariage de convenance* blunting to all the finer sensibilities and aspirations of his nature and his soul. How many scores of worldly scheming mothers were even now baiting their hooks to catch him; careless whether, once they had secured a daughter's position, a title and great wealth, that daughter found herself neglected for women of no repute. Hundreds of young men, in the great world to which Hartover belonged, ran that ugly course, and why not he?

Digitized by Google

And this thing, also, troubled me, adding to my heaviness of heart, and thereby, perhaps perversely feeding, my secret passion. For I believed that, even though he forgot Nellie, she would not forget him. I knew, or fancied I knew, her strength and steadfastness too well. Once giving her love, she gave it for good and all. I should, indeed, have been sorry, ashamed—paradoxical as it may seem—that she should forget him. It would have lowered her in my eyes, and that I could not bear. So it became an integral element of my fantastic inner life to conceive of her loving him as deeply, eternally, even though hopelessly, as I loved her. I knew, or believed I knew, her love was pure, that no stain of selfishness or ambition was upon it—that she would have felt for him all that she now felt had he been a simple yeoman, one of her own class and social kin. And as long as I could believe this, her love for Hartover threw a fresh grace and glory round the dear image which I worshipped.

No—whatever happened she must love him wholly and solely still, and I must find a mystic delight in my own despair.

Meanwhile, something happened which vexed me a little at first, amused me much after a while, and finally became of very serious moment both to myself and to others.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIII

It was the beginning of the Lent term. I had stayed up during the vacation, my college being also my home. And during that vacation a weight of loneliness descended upon me. This was wrong, since had I not very much to be thankful for? My position was a secure, and, from the university standpoint, an even brilliant one. I liked my work. It interested me. Yet, in some aspects, this university life seemed to me narrow. It pained me to see old faces depart, and new ones enter who knew naught of me. Other men halted here, but for a while, on their life's journey, moving forward to meet the larger issues, to seek "fresh fields and pastures new." And I remained—as one, held up by accident, remains at some half-way house, seeing the stream of traffic and of wayfarers sweep for ever forward along the great crowded highroad, and pass him by.

If I had not had that break in my university course, if I had not spent those two years at Hover in a society and amid interests and occupations—pleasures, let me put it roundly—foreign to my own social sphere, Cambridge, and all Cambridge stood for, would not probably have palled upon me. But I had beheld wider horizons; beheld them, moreover, through the windows of an enchanted castle. Thus memory cast its shadow over the present, making me

Digitized by Google

—it was faithless, ungrateful, I had nearly said, sinful—dissatisfied and sad.

However, being in good health, I was not too sad to eat a good dinner; and so, one fine day at the beginning of term, when the bell rang for hall, I crossed the quadrangle and went in—or went rather to the door, and there stopped short. For, face to face, I met none other than Mr. Halidane, in all the glory of a freshman's brand-new gown.

"Ah! Mr. Brownlow," he exclaimed, with his blandest and most beaming smile, "it is indeed a gracious dispensation to meet you, sir, an old and valued friend, on my first day within these hallowed and venerable walls. I feared you might not have come up yet. Allow me to congratulate you upon your distinctions, your degree, your fellowship. With what gladness have I heard of them, have I welcomed the news of your successful progress. I trust you are duly thankful to an over-ruling Providence!"

"I trust I am," quoth I.

I believed the man to be a hypocrite. He had done me all the harm he could. Yet, what with my loneliness, what with my memories of that enchanted castle, I could not but be moved at this unexpected meeting with him. I choked down my disgust, my resentment for the dirty tricks he had played me, and shaking him by the hand asked what had brought him here.

"The generosity of my pious patron," he answered, casting up his eyes devoutly. "Ah! what do

Digitized by Google

I not owe—under Providence—to that true ornament of his exalted station! Through his condescending liberality I am enabled to fulfil the wish long nearest my heart; and by taking, as I humbly hope in due time, Holy Orders, to enter upon a more extended sphere of Christian and national usefulness."

I abstained from asking how he had suddenly discovered the Church of England suited his religious convictions and abilities better than the sect of the "Saints indeed," and contented myself, not without a beating heart, by enquiring after Lord Longmoor and all at Hover.

I got answers; but none that I wanted. The Earl was perfection; the Countess perfection; even for Colonel Esdaile he had three or four superlatives. The Countess, he trusted, had been lately brought to the knowledge of the truth. The Colonel only needed to be brought to it—and he was showing many hopeful signs—to be more than mortal man.—It was evidently his cue to approve highly of Hover and all dwellers therein. And when, with almost a faltering voice, I asked news of my dear boy, he broke out into fresh superlatives; from amid the rank growth of which I could only discover that Lord Hartover was a very dashing and popular young man about town, and that it served Mr. Halidane's purpose to approve—or seem to approve—of his being such.

"The pomps and vanities of this wicked world, you know, My dear Brownlow,"—the fellow began to drop the "Mr." now—"the pomps and vanities—

Digitized by Google

but we must make allowances for youth—and those to whom little is given, you know, of them will little be required."

"Little given!" thought I with a shudder, as I contrasted Halidane's words with my own old lessons.—God grant that this fellow may not have had the opportunity of undoing all the good which I had done! I made the boy believe once that very much had been given him.—But I said nothing. Why waste words where the conversation will never go deeper than words.

So we went in to hall together; and, what was more, came out together, for it was plainly Mr. Halidane's plan to quarter himself upon me, physically and morally—physically, in that he came up into my rooms and sat down therein, his countenance falling when he perceived that I brought out no wine.

"You are a Nazarite still?" he said at last, after looking uneasily several times towards door and cupboard.

"I am, indeed," I replied, amused at his inability to keep his own counsel.

"Ah—well. All the more freedom, then, for the wine of the Spirit. I trust that we shall have gracious converse together often, my dear Brownlow, and edify one another with talk of that which belongs to our souls' health as we wander through this wilderness of tears."

I replied by asking, I fear a little slyly, after Lord Longmoor's book on prophecy.

"As was to be expected—a success," he replied—

Digitized by Google

"a magnificent success, though I say so. Not perhaps in the number of copies sold. But what is worldly fame, and how can we expect the carnal man to favour spiritual things? Not, again, from a pecuniary point of view. But what is filthy lucre? His lordship's philanthropy has enabled him, so to speak, to make the book a present, a free gift to the elect. No, not in such material gains as Christians will leave to the unsanctified, to a Scott or a Byron, does success lie; but in the cause of the Gospel. And, if humble I have been instrumental to that success, either in assisting his lordship's deeper intellect, as the mouse might the lion, or in having the book properly pushed in certain Gospel quarters where I have a little unworthy influence—(Unworthy indeed, I doubt not, thought I!)—"why, then—have I not my reward—I say, have I not my reward?"

I thought he certainly had. For being aware he wrote the whole book himself, and tacked his patron's name to it, I began to suspect shrewdly he had been franked at College as hush money, the book being a dead failure.

And so I told the good old Master next day, who slapped his thigh and chuckled, and then scolded me for an impudent truth-speaking fellow who would come to ruin by his honesty.

I assured him that I should tell no one but him, having discovered at Hover that the wisdom of the serpent was compatible with the innocence of the dove, and that I expected to need both in my dealing with Mr. Halidane.

Digitized by Google

"Why, I understood that he was an intimate friend of yours. He told me that your being here was one of the main reasons for his choosing this College. He entreated humbly to be allowed rooms as near you as possible. So—as he came with the highest recommendations from Lord Longmoor—we have put him just over your head!"

I groaned audibly.

"What's the matter? He is not given to playing skittles, or practising the fiddle at midnight, is he?"

"Heavens, no!"

But I groaned again, at the thought of having Halidane tied to me, riding me pick-a-back as the old man of the sea did Sindbad, for three years to come. In explanation I told the Master a good deal of what I knew. About Nellie, however, I still said not one word.

The Master smiled mischievously.

"I suspect the object of his sudden conversion from sectarianism is one of my lord's fat livings. You may see him a bishop yet, Brownlow, for a poor opinion of his own merits will never stand in the way of his promotion.—Well, I will keep my eye on this promising convert to the Church of England as by Law Established, meanwhile—and you may do the same if you like."

I did like—the more so because I found him, again and again, drawing round to the subject of Mr. Braithwaite and of Nellie. He slipped away smoothly enough when he saw I avoided the matter, complimenting me greasily upon my delicacy and dis-

Digitized by Google

cretion. I was torn two ways—by longing to hear something of both father and daughter, and repulsion that this man should soil the name of her whom I loved by so much as daring to pronounce it. But of all living creatures lovers are the most self-contradictory, fearing the thing they desire, desiring that which they fear.

At last one day, when he had invaded my rooms after hall, he said something which forced me to talk about Hover with him. He had been praising, in his fulsome fashion, Mademoiselle Fédore among the rest. She too, it appeared, was under gracious influences, aware of her soul's danger and all but converted—the very dogs and cats of the house were qualifying for salvation, I believe, in his suddenly charitable eyes. He finished up with—"And how nobly the poor thing behaved, too, when that villain Marsigli absconded."

"Marsigli absconded?" I exclaimed, in great surprise.

"Of course—I thought you knew——"

"I know nothing of what happened at Hover now," I said, foolishly allowing bitterness to get the better of caution.

"No—you don't tell me so!—Really, very strange," and he eyed me sharply. "But the facts are simple and lamentable enough. This villain, this viper, the trusted and pampered servant—for far too much kindness had been lavished upon him by my lord and lady, as upon all—yes, all—my unworthy self included.—How refreshing, how inspiring is

Digitized by Google

condescension in the great!—This pampered menial, I say—ah! what a thing is human nature when unregenerate!—as was to be expected—for what after all, my dear Brownlow, can you hope from a Papist?—disappeared one fine morning, and with him jewels and plate—plate belonging to our sainted friend and patron, in whose service the viper had fattened so long, to the amount of four thousand pounds."

I listened in deepening interest.

"This is serious," I said. "Has any of the property been traced and recovered?"

"Not one brass farthing's worth."

"And is there no clew?"

"None, alas! save what Mademoiselle Fédore gave. With wonderful subtlety and instinct—Ah! that it were further quickened by divine grace!—she pieced together little incidents, little trifling indications, which enabled the police to track the miscreant as far as Liverpool. But, after that, no trace. They concluded he must have sailed for America, where he is doubtless even now wantoning, amid the licentious democracy of the West, upon the plunder of the saints."

He buried his face in his hands and appeared to weep.

I remained silent, greatly perturbed in mind. For there flashed across me those words of Warcop's spoken on the morning of my departure, when I sat with him in his sanctum, dedicated to the mysteries of the stud-farm and the chase: "By times they—

Digitized by Google

Marsigli and Mamzell—are as thick as thieves. By times they fight like cat and dog or "—with a knowing look—"like man and wife." There flashed across me, too, a strange speech of Fédore's I had overheard, as I walked along one of the innumerable dimly lighted passages at Hover, one night, on my way from the library, where I had worked late, to my own study. To whom she spoke I did not know, for a door was hastily closed immediately I passed, though not hastily enough to prevent my hearing a man's voice answer.—"Ah! you great stupid," she had said. "Why not what these English call feather your own nest? I have no patience with you when, if you pleased, you could so easily be rich."—The episode made an unpleasant impression upon me at the time, but had almost faded from my mind. Now in the light of my conversation with Halidane it sprang into vivid relief.

The loss of a few thousand pounds' worth of jewels and plate was a small matter. But that Mademoiselle Fédore should remain in the household as Marsigli's accomplice—and that she was his accomplice I suspected gravely—perhaps to regain her power over the boy, was intolerable. As to her assisting the police by pointing out the probable route of the delinquent, what easier than to do so with a view to putting them on a false scent?

"This is indeed ugly news," I said at last. "I wonder if the Master knows."

"Why not? It was reported in the papers at the time."

Digitized by Google

"Ah! and I was absorbed in my work and missed it. How unfortunate!"

"Do you think you know anything, then?" he said greedily, with sharp interest.

But the question I did not answer, perceiving he was curiously anxious to be taken into my confidence.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV

I SAT long, till the fire in the grate burnt low and the chill of the winter night drove me shivering to my bed, revolving this conversation in my mind. If it could be proved that Mademoiselle Fédore was in league with the Italian, still more, if it could be proved she and he were married, Hartover could be permanently set free from her intrigues and her influence. I did not want to be vindictive; but with every fibre of my being I wanted to free the boy. For, as I realised in those lonely midnight hours, while the wind rumbled in the chimneys and roared through the bare branches of the elms in the Fellows' Garden just without, the boy's redemption, the boy's growth into the fine and splendid character he might be, could be—as I believed—even yet, was dearer to me than any advantage of my own.

Had I not promised, moreover, to stand by him and help him to the end? Could I then, in honour, sit with folded hands, when the chance, however remote, of helping him presented itself? I had always feared Mademoiselle Fédore had not relinquished her designs on the boy, but merely bided her time. For a while my presence frustrated those designs; as, in even greater degree, did his passion for Nellie Braithwaite. But marriage with Nellie forbidden, and he surrounded, as he must be, by the flatteries

Digitized by Google

lavished on, and snares set for, a rich and popular young nobleman in London, was it not too probable that in hours of idleness or reaction from dissipation she might gain an ascendency over him once more? Not only self-interest was involved. He being what he was, might she not only too easily fall genuinely in love with him? I would give her the benefit of the doubt, anyhow. Upon the exact nature of that love, whether of the higher, or the baser and animal sort, I did not choose to dwell. The difference in age, too, struck me now—more versed as I had grown in the ways of the world and of human nature —as no bar to inclination on his part. She was a clever woman and a beautiful one, of a voluptuous though somewhat hard type—to the Empress Theodora I had often compared her in my own mind. Further, as Warcop said to me long ago, did not "the she-kite know her business?"—Alas! and for certain, only too well!

So sitting there, through the lonely hours, the idea grew on me that the boy was actually in very grave peril; and that—neglect and silence notwithstanding —in his innermost heart he clung to me, and to the lessons of duty and noble living which I had taught him, still. This idea might, as I told myself, be a mere refinement of personal vanity and egoism. Yet I could not put it aside. If he called, even unconsciously, and I failed to answer, a sin of omission and a heavy one would assuredly lie at my door.

Finally I decided to seek counsel of my kind old friend, the Master. The opportunity of doing so

Digitized by Google

presented next day. For the Master had bidden me to a dinner party at the Lodge, given in honour of his widowed sister and her daughters, who were staying with him. This flutter of petticoats in our bachelor, not to say monastic, atmosphere produced in some quarters, I had reason to fancy, a corresponding flutter of hearts. Ladies were conspicuous by their absence in the Cambridge of those days, save during the festivities of the May term; and I own to a certain feeling of mild elation as I found myself seated beside Miss Alice Dynevor, the elder of the two young ladies, at the Master's hospitable board.

I cannot assert that she appeared to be remarkable either for good looks or cleverness; but she was fresh and young—about twenty, I judged her—modest in manner, and evidently desirous to please; full of innocent questions concerning Cambridge and Cambridge ways, concerning our famous buildings, their names and histories, which I found it pleasant enough to answer. In the drawing-room, when we rejoined the ladies after dinner, she went to the piano, at her uncle's request, and sang some Scotch songs and some sentimental ballads then much in vogue, with no great art, I admit, but with pleasing simplicity and a tuneful voice.

The evening left me under impressions at once agreeable and not a little sad. For, from the time I returned to Cambridge, I had hardly spoken to a woman. Doing so now, memories of Mere Ban and of Nellie crowded upon me thick and fast; and, throwing me back into that fantastic inner life of

Digitized by Google

unsatisfied and consuming love, threw me also into a necessity for renewed self-abnegation and self-torment. At all costs I must find means to set the dear boy free of Fédore's influence—set him free—and for what?

I stayed after the other guests had left and asked for a little private talk with the Master; recounted the substance of my conversation with Halidane last night, and stated my own convictions and the ground of them. He had heard of Marsigli's disappearance, but had not mentioned it to me simply because he supposed I had seen it in the newspapers. I was much vexed at the strange oversight. Had I but learned it at the time, how much might have been saved! How much truly—more a thousand times than I then imagined.—Yet how know I that? No—I will believe all the events of our lives are well ordered, so long as they do not arise from our wilful ill-doings; and will never regret, as the result of blind chance, that which is in truth the education given each one of us, for our soul's good, by an all-merciful and all-wise Father in Heaven.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXV

I TOLD the Master enough for him to agree it would be well I should go to town; and to town two days later I went. I had learned, by cautious questioning of Mr. Halidane, that the family was in London, as was Hartover.

So I made my way to the great house in Grosvenor Square, which was not altogether unknown to me. I had stayed there once, for a few days, with the dear boy, during the time of my tutorship; and to my delectation had made acquaintance with its many treasures in the matter of pictures, furniture, and *objets d'art.* Oh! the priceless possessions of these people, and the little care they had for them!

The men servants, who received me, were unknown to me, supercilious in manner and only just not insolent. I asked for my young lord. He was on guard at St. James's. They supposed I should hear of him there. Where he lived, when not staying here, they did not know.—Odd, I thought; but the ways of great folks were odd sometimes!

I took a coach and drove to the Palace. My longing to see the boy again was very strong; yet I felt anxious. Would he be greatly changed? Would he be glad or would he think my coming a bore? Above all, how would he take my interference? A sense of

Digitized by Google

the extreme delicacy of my mission increased on me, making me nervous and diffident.

An orderly ushered me into a room where half a dozen dandies were lounging. These stared at me sufficiently, and thought me, evidently, a dun. One beardless youth, indeed, after brushing past me, turning his back to me, and otherwise bristling up like a dog at a strange dog, expressed his opinion aloud.

"MacArthur!" to the orderly. "Are you not aware that this is a private room?"

"I am sorry," I said instantly, for their impertinence restored my self-confidence, "if I am intruding. I simply asked for Lord Hartover, and was, as simply, shown in here."

I thought the lad might have known me for a gentleman by my voice; but possibly his experience in life had not extended so far, for he answered:

"Lord Hartover, I imagine, pays his bills at his own house."

I did redden, I confess, being still young and sensitive; but, after staring at him as full as he stared at me, I answered, bowing:

"I am afraid I am not so useful a person as a tradesman. I am only a Cambridge scholar, formerly Lord Hartover's tutor, who wishes to see him upon urgent private business."

"I—I really beg your pardon. Pray sit down, sir," quoth the sucking hero, evidently abashed, handing me a chair.

But at that moment a pair of broad shoulders,

Digitized by Google

which had been bent over a card-table at the farther end of the room, turned about with:

"Hey? Why, Brownlow, by all that's—. Odd trick, Ponsonby—wait one moment.—How are you, my dear fellow? And what on earth brings you here among us warriors?"

And the mighty Rusher rose, like Saul the son of Kish a head and shoulders above his fellows. At first I believe he was really pleased to see me. His handsome face was genial, a light of good-natured and kindly amusement in his eye.

"Well, how are you?" he repeated. "Do you remember Brocklesby Whins and the brown horse? Come up this winter and you shall ride him again; by Jove, you shall—and take the rascally little grey fox home with you. I've got him stuffed and ready, as I promised I would; and wondered why you'd not claimed your property before."

I was beginning to speak—but he ran on:

"Brother officers, let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Brownlow, as fine a light-weight across country as you need wish to know, and who saved my pack from destruction at the risk of his own life; —a long and prosperous one may it be!"

"My hunting days are over, I fear," I said, as the men of war stared all the more at the lame young don, black-coated, black-breeched and black-stockinged—thinking, I doubt not, I was a "rum 'un to look at" even if a "good 'un to go."

"But I beg of you to tell me where I can find Lord

Digitized by Google

Hartover; or, if I cannot see him, to let me have a few words with you."

"Where is Faublas—anyone know?" the Colonel asked of the company in general, and so doing I fancied his geniality waned a little and a trace of uneasiness came into his manner. As for me, my heart sank as I heard that name, of all others, used as my poor boy's sobriquet.

"Gone down to Chelsea, I believe," said the youth who had first spoken to me, hardly repressing a smile. "He announced he should dine to-night with the fair unknown."

"I question whether he will be at home even to you, then, Brownlow," the Colonel declared, forcing a laugh.

"In that case I am afraid I must ask for a few minutes' conversation alone with you."

We went out into the Park; and there, pacing up and down under the leafless trees, I told all I thought fit. I watched his face as I did so. It was unusually serious.

"I think, my dear fellow," he said at last, "you had very much better leave this matter alone."

I asked why. He fenced with me, pointing out that I had nothing more than suspicion to go upon—no real evidence, circumstantial or otherwise. I urged on him the plain fact that the matter could not be let alone. A great felony had been committed; and it was an offence, not only against honour and right, but against law, to withhold such information as I could give.

Digitized by Google

"You will repent it," he said.

Again I asked why.

"I beg you to take my word for it, there are reasons," he said earnestly. "Be advised, my dear Brownlow. Let sleeping dogs lie."

I was puzzled—how could I help being so? But, more and more, I began to fear the connection between Fédore and Hartover had been resumed.

"And where is Mademoiselle Fédore now?" I said presently.

"'Pon honour, I am not responsible for the whereabouts of gay damsels."

"Then she is no longer with Lady Longmoor?"

"No, no—has left her these two months—may be in St. Petersburg by now, or in Timbuctoo, for aught I know."

"The police could find her there as well as here."

His tone changed, becoming as sarcastic as his easy good-nature and not very extensive vocabulary permitted.

"And so you would really hunt that poor girl to the gallows? Shut her up in gaol—eh? I thought you preached mercy, went in for motives of Christian charity, and so forth. We live and learn—well, well."

He took another turn, nervously, while I grew increasingly puzzled. Was it possible Fédore might be connected with him, and not with Hartover? If so, what more natural and excusable than his reluctance to satisfy me? That thought softened me.

Digitized by Google

"I will do nothing further," I said, "without consulting his lordship."

"His lordship?" He shrugged his shoulders, laughing contemptuously.

"Her ladyship, then."

He paused a moment.

"Yes," he said; "you're right." A new light seemed to break on him. "Yes," he repeated; "we'll go at once on the chance of finding her at home. It is only seven now. Let's call a coach."

So back we drove to Grosvenor Square, both in deep thought. Arrived at the house, he took me into a small room, off the hall, and kept me waiting there for the best part of an hour. I began to wonder, indeed, if he had forgotten me altogether, and whether I had not best ring and make some enquiry of the servants.

The room was dimly lit with wax candles, set in sconces high on the silk-panelled wall; yet not so dimly but that, when the Colonel at last returned, I could see he looked pale and agitated, while his hands and lips trembled as he spoke. And my mind carried back to the day of the meet at Vendale Green, when her ladyship—Queen of Beauty that she was—stepped down from her pony-chaise, and stood on the damp turf beside his great bay horse, talking to him; and how, straightening himself up with a jerk, his face grey and aged as that of a man smitten with sudden illness, he answered her: "Impossible, utterly impossible"; and how she, turning, with a light

Digitized by Google

laugh, got into the pony-chaise again, waving her hand to him and wishing him good fortune.

"Yes—you are to go," he said to me hurriedly. "See Hartover at once. His address is number —— Church Lane, Chelsea. You'll remember?"

"I shall."

"Remember, too, I am no party to this proceeding of yours; I warned you against it. Whatever happens you will have brought on yourself."

"Very good. I am perfectly ready to accept the responsibility of my own actions."

"And I say—see here, Brownlow. You won't tell Hartover I gave you his address."

"Of course not, if you desire it. I can decline to say where I learnt it."

"He'll find out, though, through the other officers," he muttered, as we crossed the hall and he saw me into the still waiting coach. "It's an accursed business, and we shall come ill out of it. I know we shall; but a woman must have her way."

"For Heaven's sake," I cried, "remember you are not alone."

He looked fiercely at me, as one who should say, "What have I betrayed?" Then added with a sneer:

"Brownlow, I wish to God we'd never seen you. You're a devilish deal too honest a fellow to have got among us."

With which cryptic words he went back into the great house, leaving me to drive down to Chelsea, and to my thoughts. What they were I hardly knew

Digitized by Google

myself. Sufficient that I was most miserable and full of questioning dread.

We passed, as it seemed, through endless streets, until we reached the then lonely King's Road; drove along it, turned to the left down Church Lane, and drew up at a door in a high wall apparently enclosing a garden. I got out of the coach and rang the bell. A moment after I heard a woman's quick tripping footsteps within. The door was flung wide open, disclosing a covered way leading to a pretty hall, gay with coloured curtains and carpets, and a voice cried:

"Ah! c'est toi enfin, mon bien aimé. A-t-il perdu le clef encore une fois, le petit étourdi?"

The speaker and I recoiled apart. For, immediately before me, under the passage lamp, was Fédore.

Superbly lovely, certainly, if art can create loveliness, with delicately tinted cheeks and whitened skin; her raven hair arranged, according to the prevailing mode, so as to add as much as possible to her height. Dressed, or rather undressed—for women then wore only little above the waist—in richest orange and crimson; her bare arms and bosom sparkling with jewels—none brighter, though, than these bold and brilliant eyes—there she stood, more like her namesake Empress Theodora than ever, and flashed lightnings into my face—disappointment, rage, scorn, but no trace of fear.

"And what, pray, does Monsieur Brownlow wish at such an hour of the night?"

"Nothing, Mademoiselle," I answered gravely

Digitized by Google

and humbly. "I came to see Lord Hartover, and he is not, I perceive, at home."

Was she going to shut the door on me? Nothing less. Whether from sheer shamelessness, or whether —as I have often fancied since—she read my errand in my face, she composed herself in an instant, becoming amiable and gracious.

"Could not Monsieur come in and wait? Would he not stay and sup with us?"

I bowed courteously. She was so superb, so daringly mistress of herself, I could do no less; and said I should be shocked at interrupting such a *tête-à-tête*. I apologised for having brought her to the door on so cold a night; and, raising my hat, departed, having, at least, taken care to tell her nothing.

Why should I not depart? Had I not seen enough, and more than enough? The Rusher was right so far—for who was I to interfere? What had I to offer Hartover as against that gorgeous and voluptuous figure? If my suspicions could be proved, and I succeeded in parting him from her, would he not go to someone else? And who was I, after all, to judge her, to say hard words to her? If she were dazzled by him, what wonder? If he by her, what wonder either?—Ah! that they had let him marry Nellie, boy though he was, two years ago! But such is not the way of the world; and the way of the world, it seemed, he was doomed to go.—Oh! weary life, wherein all effort for good seemed but as filling the sieve of the Danaides. Oh! weary work for

Digitized by Google

clean living and righteousness, which seemed as a rolling of Sisyphus' stone for ever up the hill, to see it roll down again. What profit has a man of all his labour? That which has been shall again be, and there is no new thing under the sun.

I went back to Cambridge unhappy, all but cynical and despairing, and settled down to my routine of work again, and to the tender attentions of Mr. Halidane, to whom however I told no word about my fruitless expedition to London. And so sad was I, and in such a state of chronic irritation did Halidane keep me, that I verily believe I should have fallen ill, had not the fresh evil been compensated for by a fresh good—and that good taken the form of renewed intercourse with Mr. Braithwaite.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXVI

IT fell out on this wise. In the hope of lightening the weight of depression under which I laboured, I took to riding again so many afternoons a week—an indulgence which I could now afford. True, a hack from a livery stable was but a sorry exchange for the horses upon which Warcop had been wont to mount me; but if love of horse-flesh takes you that way—and take me that way it did—the veriest crock is better to bestride than nought.

The day was fine, with sunshine and white fleets of blithely sailing cloud. Hedges and trees thickened with bud, and the rooks were nesting. I had made a long round by Madingley and Trumpington, and was walking my horse back slowly over the cobbles of King's Parade—admiring, as how many times before, the matchless Chapel, springing from the green-sward, its slender towers, pinnacles and lace-work of open parapet rising against spaces of mild blue sky—when, amid groups upon the pavement wearing cap and gown, or less ceremonial boating and football gear, a tall heavily built figure, clothed in a coat with bulging skirt-pockets to it, breeches and gaiters of pepper-and-salt-mixture, attracted my eye. The man halted now and again to stare at the fine buildings; and at last, crossing where the side street runs from

Digitized by Google

King's Parade to the Market Place, turned into the big bookseller's at the corner.

I thought I could hardly be mistaken as to his identity; and, calling a down-at-heels idler to hold my horse, I dismounted and followed him into the shop. If I had made a mistake, it would be easy to ask for some book or pamphlet and so cover my discomfiture.

But I had made no mistake. Though older and greyer, his strong intellectual face more deeply lined by thought, and, as I feared, by care, Braithwaite himself confronted me.

"Thou hast found me, oh! mine enemy," he exclaimed, while the clasp of his hand gave the lie to this doubtful form of greeting. "And, to tell the truth, I hoped you might do so; though I was in two minds about seeking you out and calling on you myself."

I returned the clasp of his hand; but, for the moment, my heart was almost too full for speech.

"Enemy, neither now nor at any time in our acquaintance," I faltered.

"I know, I know," he answered. "But until you were your own master, and had finally cut adrift from certain high folks in high places, I reckoned we were best apart."

"And you were right. Now, for good or evil, all that is over and done with"—and truly and honestly I believed what I said.

"So much the better," he replied heartily. "Then we can start our friendship afresh—that is, of course,

Digitized by Google

if an ornament of this ancient seat of learning, a full-fledged don like yourself, is not too fine and fastidious a person to associate with a plain middle-class man such as me."

I bade him not be foolish—he had a better opinion of me, I hoped, than that—asked what of "the pride which apes humility," and so forth; and all the while questions about Nellie, her health, her well-being, her present whereabouts, scorched my tongue. I invited him to my rooms—which I think pleased him—so that we might talk more at our ease; but he told me he had the better part of a twenty-mile drive before him, back to Westrea, a farm which he had lately bought on the Suffolk border. We therefore agreed that, when I had sent my horse back to the stable, I should join him at the inn, just off the Market Place, where his gig was put up.

And in the dingy inn parlour, some quarter of an hour later, I at last found courage and voice to enquire for Nellie. His face clouded, I thought.

"In answering you frankly, I give you the strongest proof of friendship which I can give," he said.

I thanked him.

"It went hard with her at first, poor lass," he continued, "brave and dutiful though she is. And that's what has brought me further south. I judged it best to get her right away from the Yorkshire country and sound of Yorkshire speech. So I threw up my tenancy of the place I had taken on leaving Mere Ban. I may tell you I came into some little money through the death of a relative, last year, which en-

Digitized by Google

abled me to buy this Westrea farm. I took Nellie with me to view it, and the house caught her fancy. 'Tis a pretty old red-brick place, and my gift to her. I want her to make a home of it, and interest herself in the development of the property—about nine hundred acres in all. She has an excellent head for business; and, in my opinion, there's no better medicine than keeping hands and brain occupied in such a case as hers."

He broke off abruptly, as though unwilling to pursue the subject further, adding:

"But there, come and see for yourself what our new quarters are like, Brownlow. No purple wind-swept fells piled up to high heaven behind it, truly; still, a pleasant enough spot in its way, and fine corn-land too. I can offer you a comfortable bed and a good plain dinner; and a horse you needn't be ashamed to ride, notwithstanding your free run of his lordship's stud at Hover. Come during the vacation. Easter falls late this year; and the orchard trees should be in blossom, supposing we get a fine spring, as I believe we shall. It'll do you no harm to drop your classics and mathematics, part company with your scandalous old heathen poets and divinities and take the living world of to-day by the hand for forty-eight hours or so. I'll be bound your radicalism has deteriorated in this academic dry-as-dust atmosphere too, and will be none the worse for a little wholesome rubbing up."

So to Westrea I promised to go, his invitation having been given so spontaneously and kindly. A

Digitized by Google

dangerous experiment perhaps, but the temptation was too strong for me. At last I should see Nellie again, and learn how matters really stood with her. That thought threw me into a fever of excitement.

To go in to hall, with the chance of meeting Halidane and having the fellow saddle his unctuous, not to say oily, presence upon me for the rest of the evening, was intolerable. So, after starting Braithwaite upon his homeward journey, I got a scratch meal at the inn, and then made my way to The Backs across bridge, and wandered in the softly deepening twilight under the trees beside the river. I tried—but alas how vainly!—to calm my excitement, and school myself into rejection alike of the wild hopes and dark forebodings which assailed me. I lost count of time, and wandered thus until the lamps were lit and the moonlight touched the stately masses of college buildings, rising pale from their lawns and gardens, on the other side of the placid slow-flowing stream. Hence it was comparatively late when, at length, I climbed the creaking, foot-worn oaken stairs leading to my rooms.

Immediately on entering I saw that a letter lay upon the table. It was in Hartover's handwriting. Trembling, I tore it open.

Why should he write to me after so long a silence? Had he heard of my visit to St. James's Palace? Of my visit to Church Lane? About Fédore surely it must be; and when I began to read I found that so indeed it was.

Digitized by Google

"DEAREST BROWNLOW,"—it ran—"I have news to tell you which will astonish and at first, I am afraid, shock you. But, after a little, you will see it is right enough; and that, in honour, I could not do otherwise than I have done. For nearly two months now I have been married to Fédore."

My head fairly spun round. Faint and dizzy, I sank into the nearest chair, and read on with staring eyes.

"My reasons were very simple. I do not ask you to approve them; but to weigh and judge them fairly. You know the circumstances under which I came to town and joined my regiment. Parted from Her whom I loved—and whom I shall never forget, the thought of Her will always be sweet and sacred to me—I became utterly reckless. She was gone. You were gone."

Was that a reproach, and a merited one? Whether or not, it cut me to the quick.

"There was no one to care what I did, no one for me to care for. Nothing seemed to matter. I plunged into all the follies—and worse—of a young man about town. I will not disgust you by describing them—suffice it that I found plenty both of men and women to share them with me. I tried to drown remembrance of Her, of you, of everything noble and good, in pleasure. And at last, you will hardly be surprised to hear, I fell into my old madness of drink. I was horribly, quite horribly, you understand, hopeless and unhappy. About my own people I say nothing—to their own Master they stand or fall. I do not want to talk, or even think about them.

Digitized by Google

But by last autumn I had pretty well ruined my health. I had, so the doctors told me, delirium tremens. I know my nerves were shattered, and life seemed a perfect hell. As I lay ill and mad, Fédore came to me. She nursed me, controlled me, pulled me through. She was most true to me when others wished her to be most false. There were those, she has told me since—as I suspected all along, even in the old days at Hover—who would be glad enough for me to kill myself with debauchery. She talked to me, reasoned with me. You yourself could not have spoken more wisely. But I felt, Brownlow, I felt I could not stand alone. I must have someone to lean on, to be loved by and to love. It is a necessity of my nature, and I obeyed it. Fédore saved me, and I paid her by marrying her. She refused at first, warned me of my seeming folly, of what the world would say; told me there were difficulties, that she, too, had enemies. But I insisted.—Remember she had compromised herself, endangered her reputation by coming to me.—At last she gave way, confessing, dear creature, she had loved me all along, loved me from a boy.

"You will say, what about the future? I defy it, snap my fingers at it. It must take care of itself. It can't, in any case, be more hateful than the past.

"And so good-bye, dear old man. Judge me fairly at least; and keep my secret—for secret our marriage must be as long as my father is alive. Fédore sends kind remembrances, and bids me say when you know all—and there is more behind—you will not think of her too harshly."

Should I not? The woman had greater faith in my leniency—or stupidity, which?—than I myself had. No harshness was too great, surely, in face of

Digitized by Google

the wrong she had done the boy by marrying him. Yet two things were true. For that she loved him—according to her own conception of love—I did not doubt; and that she had rescued him from the demon of drink—for the time being—I did not doubt either. And this last—let me try to be just—this last must be counted to her, in some degree at all events, for righteousness whatever her ulterior object in so rescuing him might have been.

But admitting that much, I had admitted all that was possible in her favour. She had hunted the boy, trapped him, pinned him down, making his extremity her own opportunity; cleverly laying him under an obligation, moreover, which could not but evoke all his native sensibility and chivalry.

The more I thought of it, the more disastrous, the more abominable did the position appear. So much so that, going back to his letter, I read it over and over to see if I could make it belie itself and find any loophole of escape. But what was written was written. In Hartover's belief he had made Fédore, and done right in making her, his wife.

And there were those, then, who would gladly compass his death! The last scene with Colonel Esdaile flashed across me; and other scenes, words, gestures, both of his and of her ladyship's. Was the boy really and actually the victim of some shameful conspiracy? Only one life stood between the Colonel and the title, the great estates, the great wealth. Was her ladyship playing some desperate game to secure these for him and—for herself, and for her

Digitized by Google

children as his wife? She was still young enough to bear children.—In this ugly coil that cardinal point must never be forgotten. But how could Fédore's marrying Hartover forward this? Had the woman been set on as her ladyship's tool, and then betrayed her employer and intrigued on her own account?

Good Heavens! and Nellie was free now. At that thought I sprang up; but only to sink back into my chair again, broken by the vast perplexity, the vast complexity, of it all. Free? Did I not know better than that. Had not her father's tone, her father's words in speaking of her, told me her heart was very far from free. Should I so fall from grace as to trade on her despair, and tempt her to engage herself to me while she still loved Hartover? Would not that be to follow Fédore's example—almost; and take a leaf out of her very questionably virtuous or high-minded book? Besides, how did I know Nellie would ever be willing to engage herself to me? Vain dream—for, after all, what did the whole thing amount to?—Hartover was not of age. His marriage was null—if he so chose. He could find means to dissolve it himself, surely, when he found out Fédore, and saw her in her true colours.—And he should see. My temper rose. I would expose her. I would appeal to Lord ——. I would move heaven and earth till I could prove her complicity in Marsigli's felony—and her connection with him, her real marriage. I would——

But alas! what could I do, with so many persons —powerful, rich, unscrupulous—arrayed against

Digitized by Google

me?—Hartover himself, more than likely, protecting, in a spirit of chivalry, the woman who had nursed and befriended him, and to whom—as he believed—he had given his name in wedlock. I, on the other hand, armed but with light and broken threads of suspicion and of theory. For so far, as the Colonel had reminded me, I possessed no actual evidence, circumstantial or otherwise, against her.

No; it was impossible to break the web in which she and others—to their shame—had entangled him. I would put the whole deplorable business from me, and go quietly to Westrea for the Easter vacation. And Nellie?—I would never tell her. If she hoped still, I would never undeceive her. The dark cloud might blow over, the foul bubble burst—and then!—Meanwhile I would be to her as a brother. I would help her, strengthen her; in a sense, educate her. For what? For whom?—God knew——

But, just there, I was startled out of my painful reverie by shouts, confused tumult in the usually silent court below, and rush of feet upon the stair.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXVII

I DREW aside the curtain, unlatched the casement, and leaned out. Upon the elms in the Fellows' Garden, the lawns, and laurel shrubberies, moonlight lay soft and white. But looking upward I saw, above the angle of the parapet, a great column of smoke, dashed with fiery flakes, surging into the wind-swept sky. I hurried into my dressing-room, which overlooked the inner court, and there a strange scene met my eyes. A red glare, jets of smoke and angry flame deformed the opposite façade; while, over the grass plats and paved ways of the little quad and about the fountain in the centre, dark shapes rushed to and fro, raised hands and upturned faces showing unnaturally pale and distorted in the dreadful light.—A living page torn from Dante's Inferno, it seemed.

The fire was here, then, close at hand, within the precincts of the College itself.

Shocked and alarmed, I searched for my keys—I was always a careful and methodical person—that I might lock away Hartover's letter in my desk. But my study lamp had burned low, and, between agitation and the semi-darkness, I failed to put my hand on them; so thrust the letter between the pages of a big lexicon lying on the writing-table, and ran out, dragging on my gown.

When I got on to the landing I found I had not

Digitized by Google

brought my sporting key. I would have gone back for it; but the noise increased below, while men, racing down from the upper stories, shouted, in passing, that the Master's Lodge was alight and lives endangered. I remembered that Mrs. Dynevor, the Master's sister, and her daughters—the young lady who had made herself so innocently pleasant to me at dinner—were still his guests, and this added to my alarm. After all, who would think of entering my rooms at such a moment as this? I ran on, leaving my outer door unfastened.

The whole population of the College seemed to be congregated in the small quadrangle, from vice-master and senior fellows—"grave and reverend signors," equally able and ready to appreciate good wine, a good dinner, an apt Greek quotation or pawky Latin joke—to gyps, scullions and cooks. Under the direction of the city fire brigade, a chain of willing workers had been formed passing buckets from hand to hand from the fountain to the side door of the Lodge. But it was only too evident the fire had firm hold, and the means of arresting it were sadly inadequate.

Anxious to know if the ladies were in safety, I made my way towards the Master, who, calm and dignified, tried to pacify a little group of terrified women—among whom I gladly recognised Mrs. Dynevor and her younger daughter—torn from their sleep only half-clothed, and wrapped in shawls and coverlets. But just as I reached him a cry of horror went up from the crowd.

Digitized by Google

The Lodge, sandwiched in between the Chapel on one side and Hall on the other, is the oldest portion of the College buildings, dating from pre-Reformation times. Looking up, now, at the low narrow windows of the third floor, I saw, as others had just seen, in the light of a sudden outburst of flame, a girl's face, her arms outstretched in agonised appeal between the heavy bars.

"Alice," the Master cried aloud, for the moment losing his fine composure. "Alice, left behind in the blue bedroom! I thought she was here. And—merciful powers—the fire between us and her!"

Careless of the restraints of age and of his official position, he broke away, almost roughly, from poor Mrs. Dynevor, who clung to him weeping, and rushed towards the side door. A sudden energy seizing me—I was half maddened already by pity and excitement—I kept pace with him.

"Show me where? Tell me how to reach the blue room, sir," I cried; and calling to the nearest fireman, we three went on into the burning house—while awed silence fell upon the crowd without.

What a labyrinth of a place it was, all wainscotted and panelled too, the woodwork like so much tinder from age and dry rot! We ran through passages choked with acrid fumes, up stairs dripping with foul water, past the doors of pleasant studious rooms where we heard the fire hissing and crackling within; finally half-way down a long corridor—and there we stopped short. Ahead of us stretched an apparently

Digitized by Google

impenetrable barrier of smoke; and beyond it, felt rather than seen, a redness of bellowing flame.

Three times we pushed forward into the smoke, and thrice staggered back half senseless. The third time I got far enough to find the floor burning and crumbling beneath my feet. All ingress was cut off.

"Ah! the poor child, the poor doomed child," the Master wailed, stirred to the depths of his kindly and genial nature. "She must die—and, oh! my God, what a death."

"Can they raise no ladder to the window from the court?" I asked, distracted by the sight of my old friend's grief.

"What use? You forget the bars."

"Can we break through no party-wall?—from a side room?"

"Yes—a side room. The door is there—within the smoke—on the left, if you can reach it. God bless you for the thought—and we may save her yet."

"Have you an axe?" I cried to the fireman.

"Trust me for that, sir," he answered.

And we again passed into the curtain of smoke, hand in hand, I foremost. Choking, blinded, stifled, in a hideous light which yet was almost total darkness, I groped along the wall for the door. It could not have been more than five yards off, but those yards seemed to lengthen into miles. The Master gave in, not from lack of courage or determination, but simply from physical exhaustion—and, with a groan, fell fainting.

Digitized by Google

"Carry him back," I panted, and feeling for the fireman's hand snatched the axe from it.

"Come back, too, sir," he whispered hoarsely, "or you're a dead man."

But nothing was further from my thoughts, or from my wishes, than turning back. A strange exhilaration possessed me. The heavy weight of trouble about the dear boy, of trouble about Nellie, was lifted off me. I felt strong and free in the choking red darkness of the burning house, almost as I felt strong and free when I saved the pack, under the open sky, on the crest of the fells high above royal Hover. The student, the man of thought and of books, had given place to the man of action, of adventure and practical achievement. I knew full well that I took my life in my hand. What did that matter? If I lived, I lived; if I died, I died; and—equally in either case—might God have mercy on my soul! But, honestly I can declare, I never felt more at peace, more happy, than as—half-asphyxiated by nauseous vapours—I groped my way along the smoke-hidden wall, found the handle, turned it, and, opening the door, passed into a comparatively clear atmosphere.

Slamming the door to behind me, I crossed the room and thrusting some furniture aside, began hewing at the wall, with a singular light-heartedness of fury. Mercifully the wall was only lath and plaster. In less than five minutes I cleared a way into the fateful blue bed-chamber beyond.

Ah! what a cruel sight! On my right flames

Digitized by Google

flickered up the half-burned door. The plaster was dropping from the ceiling. Blue tongues of fire ran along the skeleton uprights. All one side of the room glowed red in hideous decay. The bed-hangings were just flashing into a blaze.

Where was she, the innocent friendly young girl, with whom I had conversed and to whose simple singing I had listened, so far from all hint of tragedy and danger, but a week or two ago?

Crouched below the window, faint whether from that agonised crying for help, or from terror, she had curled her limbs together and laid her down to burn piecemeal. There was nothing to be seen among the white robes but a long tress of brown hair and her poor little bare feet, which quivered convulsively as though in momentary expectation the flame would reach them and the torture begin.

"Alice—Miss Dynevor," I called, but she did not move.

I tore a blanket from the bed, wrapped her in it, lifted her up and bore her back through the opening in the wall, rudely enough.

And then?—How to escape I knew not. The door I had entered by, almost impossible then, must be wholly so by now. The window was useless; the lights too narrow for a body to pass through, even had they not been barred. We were trapped indeed—the horrible moment only postponed awhile, and for two lives now instead of one. Still that strange exaltation held me. Never had I felt, as just then, the worthlessness of mere earthly life. What

Digitized by Google

did it signify to the world, what did it signify to me, whether I was what men call alive, or what men call dead? I had tried for once to live for some purpose; and—as it seemed—had failed. I had thought, in myself, that I could help God; but God had chosen to go His own way—or let the devil go his—and do without me. Now all I knew was that, although I was not necessary to God, God was more necessary to me than ever before. Yea, though He slew me, would I trust in Him!

Nevertheless, burn this young girl should not, if I could help it. I made up my mind what to do—quickly enough, as was needful, for the room we had just left was all aflame. I had cut through one wall. I would try to cut through another; and, if I could not, I would wrap the blanket so closely round her that she should smother rather than burn——

All this darted through my mind, as thoughts are said to through a drowning man's, in an instant of time. Not three minutes, indeed, had we been together in that second room before I was hewing at the wall.

The first stroke jarred me to the shoulders. This was of brick, then. And how thick?—How could I tell? My heart sank within me, I own. A four-inch wall I might pierce. But a nine-inch, a fourteen-inch —and these forefathers of ours stinted neither material nor labour. They built solidly. Heaven help me—for my arms were aching and stiff already; and, even had they not been, I dared not strike too hard lest I break the axe-handle, which was light and thin.

Digitized by Google

A brief space, which seemed infinite, while the flames crackled behind us and the room filled with smoke.

Again a brief space, and a frightful thought crossed my mind. Even if I succeeded, what was beyond? Might not the adjoining room be on fire likewise?

For the strain became too great, too prolonged. Exhausted as I was by violent exertion in that stifling atmosphere, reaction set in. It was, I honestly believe, more physical than moral; but once more I felt that cruel sinking of the heart, along with almost uncontrollable terror of the bodily torment surely awaiting me. Trapped, hopeless, lost—my arms dropped at my sides.

Shame, though, shame that I should turn craven now! So, praying as I had never prayed before, I heaved up weary hands and struck a desperate blow, which—cracked the axe-handle. But for this I could afford to care little, since I had felt the whole structure shake and bulge under that blow. I clutched the handle in both hands, and butted with the axe-head at the wall, using every ounce of force left in me.

A full yard of bricks and rubble fell outward with a mighty crash; and I, lurching forward, saw below me, touched by slanting rays of white moonlight, the wet steps of a winding stone stair. For some seconds I was too weak, from sheer thankfulness, to move.

Then, not without an effort—for I felt childishly fearful of losing sight of those cool wet steps for

Digitized by Google

however brief an interval—I turned and raised Alice Dynevor from the ground, bidding her wake, telling her all was well, that we were saved; and gathering her in my arms, I put her, feet foremost, through the jagged, blessed cleft in the wall.

As I did so, my ears were greeted by a cheer, and a dozen gownsmen swarmed up the slippery stairway, strong young hands outstretched to help, eager young voices pouring forth rejoicing and generous praise. How good it was, how beautiful, how sustaining after the vision of hell, which I had met, battled with, and, God be thanked, overcome and left behind!

They would have borne us away in triumph in their enthusiasm; but Alice Dynevor stood up, shrinking and drawing the blanket closer round her.

"No," she faltered. "Take me—you take me—I am frightened—let no one touch me but you."

So, not a little affected by her trust in me, I gathered her up once more, staggered down, and out into the sweet, clear open air, while the young men held me right and left. She had twined her arms tight round my neck, still quivering and trembling in every limb.

In the courtyard the crowd fell apart, cheering, as the Master came to us. He was calm and collected; but his face worked with emotion as he lifted Alice Dynevor off my shoulder. And as he did so, I felt upon my cheek, upon my lips—was it my fancy?—surely not—a kiss, warm and ardent. A living

Digitized by Google

woman's kiss—the first I had ever known since my mother's kisses in childhood, long years ago.

I was somewhat of a stoic—stoic by ill-health and cold blood; stoic by long self-restraint; yet that kiss made me start and shudder, not with pain. I could not forget it. The sensation of its impress remained with me for many hours.

I ascertained that, although the Master's Lodge was practically gutted, a fair proportion of its contents in the way of books and furniture was saved. The fire, successfully checked right and left, had spared both the Chapel and Hall. With that assurance, worn out both in body and mind, bruised, scorched, begrimed, a sorry enough sight, I managed to slip out of the kindly and excited throng unobserved. Assuredly I had earned my sleep to-night!

But another disquieting episode was in store for me before I got it.

For as, wearily and painfully, I climbed my staircase, I heard footsteps coming out from my rooms. I hurried to the best of my power; but, ere I reached the first landing, they travelled on cautiously to the second. I followed thither. Doors stood open on to rooms, empty and dark, for the men were still busy in the court below. But in one I saw a twinkling light. I entered, without apology, to find friend Halidane, hastily divesting himself of coat and waistcoat preparatory to going to bed.

"My dear Brownlow!" he exclaimed, with effusive cordiality, though, as I fancied, some confusion.

Digitized by Google

"What brings you here? What do you want? Alas! I see you are hurt. Let me come down and dress your wounds.—Nay, nay, do not deny me the christian joy of tending on a christian hero in his suffering and distress."

"You were in my rooms just now, were you not?" I asked bluntly.

"I—why should I be in your rooms? Or rather, indeed, why should I not? I looked in at your door, it being unfastened, hearing you had left the quad, and longing to assist you after your fatigues. But, finding no light, came upstairs at once. I assure you —Ah! do not deny me—let me help you to prepare for rest."

"No, thank you," I said, convinced, from his very anxiety to allay my suspicions, that he lied. Smug though his countenance was, he could not hide an expression which spelled guilt—at least so I thought. As for his not looking me in the face when he spoke, he never did so—hence nothing could be inferred from that.

I turned to go, while he alternately bepraised my conduct and bemoaned my sufferings—one as fulsomely as the other. He followed me to my door, nervously, as I thought; but I sported him out firmly, if civilly, leaving him in no doubt that I did not covet his presence. I lighted a lamp, and then I hastened to examine the big book. I reasoned with my alarm, for it was not possible that he knew Hartover's letter lay hidden in it. But alarm remained. I was constantly and radically distrustful of the man.

Digitized by Google

Tired out though I was, before all things I must make sure the letter was safe.

Yes, it was safe enough. With a sigh of relief I locked it away in my desk. But what was that on the shiny surface of the table?—A large drop of tallow.

All my suspicions revived. I opened the lexicon again. I did not know at what page I had put in the letter, but I found out only too soon. Inside the leaf edges was a smear of tallow, which led me to notice a couple more big drops badly defacing the text. Clumsy rogue! For surely there was a candle on his chimney-piece when I saw him upstairs? Still, it might have been the gyp or bed-maker. No; they would certainly be at the fire, and what could they be doing in any man's room at four o'clock in the morning?

Blaming myself bitterly for my carelessness, I undressed; and lay tossing, sleepless, till dawn, what with exhaustion, excitement, the dread that prying hypocrite had learned my dear boy's secret, and—must I admit it?—the memory of Alice Dynevor's kiss.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXVIII

AND here I must make a confession, if I am to put my story honestly upon paper. For the events of that night produced results upon which I cannot look back with satisfaction.

True, the position in which they placed me was none of my own seeking, but forced on me by circumstance. Still, I cannot wholly excuse myself of fault. Like most men, I suppose, I possess a fair share of vanity; though, Heaven knows, in my case, what with lameness, poverty, and the obscurity of my early lot, vanity had little enough, so far, to feed upon. Perhaps, on this very account, it was all the more greedy of sustenance. My rescue of Alice Dynevor was the nine days' wonder of the College. I was acclaimed a veritable hero. This affected me but little. Granted the opportunity, a score of men, as I told them, would have done everything I had, and probably done it ten times better. Having risked my life once to save a few hounds, there was no great credit in risking it a second time to save a human being.

But the matter did not end there. It would have been better had it done so—for my conscience's sake, and, I am afraid, for the peace of mind of others. What my kind old friend and Master said to me I shall not repeat. Still less shall I repeat what was

Digitized by Google

said to me by Mrs. Dynevor. Who dare measure the tenderness of a mother's heart or the generosity of its gratitude?

While the Lodge was refitting and rebuilding, the Master removed to a house in Trumpington Street, near the Fitzwilliam Museum, surrounded by large park-like grounds. The three ladies were still his guests; indeed, report declared they had taken up their abode with him permanently. Here, I was asked to dinner often, twice a week perhaps; and told, moreover, to consider myself on the footing of an intimate friend, free to come in and out when I liked. And pleasant enough was that permission. Pleasant to a lonely man, such as I, to meet bright smiling faces, to sit and talk, or listen to music, to be petted—mothered almost—by a comely older woman, welcomed and made much of by younger ones. The whole thing was new to me—new as it was flattering and charming. I slipped into something approaching intimacy before I realised what was happening.

For, as the days went by, I could not but perceive that Alice, the girl whose life I had saved, bestowed on me very kindly glances—glances in which I, though unskilled in such language, read something deeper and—shall I say?—sweeter than mere gratitude. To her kiss—if kiss indeed it was—given under the stress of great emotion, I did not attach importance. To do so would have been, in my opinion, both unchivalrous and fatuous. But, as between man and maid, there is a light in young eyes which

Digitized by Google

can hardly be mistaken by even the most cold-blooded or most ignorant. And that light I beheld, evening after evening, upon her smiling and ingenuous countenance.

She was not, as I have already said, particularly pretty, or particularly clever, or particularly anything beyond being well educated and well brought up, with the good manners which come of an amiable nature and the habit of moving in the society of her equals. But for the experiences of that fearful night I should, in all probability, have met her, parted from her, and remembrance of her would have faded from my mind altogether. As it was, I could not but observe—nor deny I took a certain pleasure in observing—that she sought and preferred my company; that when we talked she led the conversation, in as far as she knew how, to tender, earnest, fanciful subjects—such as, in those days, were called "sentiment"—and tried to gain a response from me. And, within certain limits, my vanity being flattered though my heart was untouched, I did respond. I had no wish to mislead her; but I was weak and self-indulgent in that, the present being agreeable, I let things drift.

I do not pretend to justify, or indeed quite to understand my own state of mind at that period. I was still under the influence of my trouble and disappointment about Hartover, the bitterness of my own inability to help the dear boy, and save him from the consequences of his own ill-judged action. I trembled for his future. I had written to him, and oh!

Digitized by Google

what a letter to write! To be at once truthful and moderate required all my judgment and tact. I could not approve, yet I feared to alienate him by expression of my real feeling. My love for Nellie Braithwaite told on me, too—and the temptation to profit by Hartover's marriage and press my own suit. Thus, perplexed and unhappy, I fell, I own, from high standards of endeavour. The things dearest to me I had failed in, or knew were beyond my grasp. A cheaper, commoner way of success and of happiness—happiness, that is, of a sort—lay open to me. Should I fling aside impossible ideals, and take it?

For I could not but observe, further, that Mrs. Dynevor, and the Master himself, looked on at my intercourse with Alice complacently enough; that the former managed adroitly to throw us together, encouraged us to sing and read together, found opportunities for leaving us alone often—and too often. After all, I was no unfit match for her daughter. I was already a fellow and tutor of my College, with the prospect of a good college living hereafter: the prospect if the Hartover interest did fail me—and fail me, I felt pretty sure for many reasons, it would not—of presentation to the first rich living in Lord Longmoor's gift which might fall vacant if I chose to apply for it. I was as well born as the Master. He had made his way in the world, even as I was in the act of making mine, by personal ability and scholarship. Hence, on the score of station, there could be no valid objection to my suit.

Should I then—for there were actually times when

Digitized by Google

I began to ask myself this—renounce high romance, and the many sacrifices and sorrows which go along with it, and content myself with a comfortable country rectory and the company of an amiable and affectionate wife—a very respectable and respected manner of existence after all, with chances, moreover, of doing much good after a quiet unostentatious fashion?

Who could blame me if I accepted such a future?

No one, surely—unless I blamed myself. There was the crux, the rub. For should I not blame myself, and that increasingly as years went on, unless I renounced my present standards and declined upon altogether lower levels of thought and effort; unless, in fact, I allowed myself to sink into a certain moral and mental sloth—the sloth of one who, hearing, refuses the call to battle, preferring ignobly to "stay by the stuff?"

Thus outwardly in lively and in pleasant intercourse, inwardly in travail of spirit and indecision, time passed until the end of the Lent term was well in sight.

Then, one evening, when I had been dining at the house in Trumpington Street, as I bade the Master good-night, he told me that he, and Mrs. Dynevor and her daughters, intended to spend the vacation at Bath, and invited me to join the party as his guest.

"You really must come, Brownlow," he said, "for my young ladies count upon your escort for the various expeditions they propose to make in the neighbourhood of the city of Bladud. They will be sadly

Digitized by Google

put out if you desert us—and so, my dear fellow, shall I."

He laid his hand kindly upon my shoulder.

"I have come to depend upon your companionship more than I ever have on that of any man of your age. It is a pleasure and entertainment to me—I had almost said a solace. For we portly old bachelors have our hours of regret, you know, for the family life which, for some reason good or bad, or from no reason at all but our own laziness, we rejected, or missed, in our earlier years. There comes a time to most of us when, if a man is wholesome, his heart in the right place, he grows tired of living for and by himself, and begins to look to the second generation, to sons and daughters, for his interest and hold on life. A risky time!—Some old fools try to retrieve the position by marrying. That form of senile dementia, thank heaven! has not attacked me as yet. But I own I like having young people about me. And specially, Brownlow, I like having you in and out of my house. So, my good fellow, be prepared to pack up your traps by this day week, and start with us for Bath. We shall take a post-chaise as well as my carriage, and make a two days' journey of it."

His affection touched me deeply, the more so that I could not disguise from myself the meaning and purpose of that which he said. It was an invitation, surely, to declare myself in respect of Alice Dynevor, an assurance that such a declaration had his approval and support. I was both embarrassed and troubled

Digitized by Google

by self-reproach. Immediately, however, my course of action was clear. I told him, with many expressions of genuine sorrow, that it was impossible for me to accompany the party to Bath, since I had already promised to spend the vacation with friends in the country—friends whom I had known when I was at Hover. The promise was of long standing, one which, without flagrant discourtesy, I could not break. Though evidently disappointed, and even a little vexed, he admitted the justice of what I said.

"Well, well; perhaps, though you cannot go with us, you can join us at Bath for a week before our return."

And he asked me one or two questions about these Yorkshire friends, which fortunately I could answer without making any mention of Nellie.

I walked back to my College deep in thought. For, clearly, I must not play with the situation any longer. I must arrive at a final decision. I must pull myself together and refuse to drift. Once and for all I must know my own mind. But to do so I must see Nellie Braithwaite first.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIX

A WARM drizzling mist, shot with silver light where the April sun vainly tried to break through, covered the hedgeless fields, dark plough and green pasture, and the great fen lands, as I drove out the twenty miles from Cambridge to Westrea. I had hired a gig from the livery stable, driven by a superannuated post-boy, a withered scrap of a creature, toothless and—rather to my relief—silent, save for professional clickings and chirrupings addressed to his horse. The gig bobbed and curtsied over the rutted cross-country roads at a bare six miles an hour. We passed but few villages, a few scattered cottages, a few farm-carts—these mostly drawn by oxen, to me an unusual sight. The country was bare, featureless, sparsely inhabited, and sad. Once or twice the mist, lifting, disclosed vast reed-beds and expanses of still blue-brown water, off which, with strange plaintive cries and a mighty whirring and beating of wings, great flocks of wild fowl rose.

As we neared our destination the landscape assumed a more cheerful character, being diversified by low hills, fine timber trees, and patches of wood; more prosperous, too, with neater cottages, a better type both of farm and farming, and clean running brooks in place of stagnant fen.

Directed by the rubicund and jovial host of a way-

Digitized by Google

side inn, we turned off the main road, through a field gate, and drove some quarter of a mile down an avenue of fine oaks to a comely red-brick house set in the hollow—tile-roofed and gabled, with stacks of high twisted chimneys, the whole dating, as I judged, from the latter part of the seventeenth century. In front of it a garden, the box-edged borders bright with spring flowers, brick walls—against which fruit trees were trained—on either hand, stretched down to the stream, here artificially widened into a sort of moat, its banks supported by masonry. Even now, through the drizzling rain, the place seemed to tell of ample, if homely, comfort and prosperity.

Crossing the stream by a hump-backed brick bridge, the gig drew up, amid flutter of pigeons and barking of dogs, before a square porch, where Braithwaite met me with extended hand.

"Well—so here you are," he said. "And welcome to Westrea—no man more so; though the skies might have treated you in kindlier fashion, we must own."

Then, as I clambered down and tipped my ancient driver, he lifted out my carpet bag and called to Nellie. And I, looking once again into her beautiful face, knew, beyond all question of doubt, that the words asking the Master's niece, Alice Dynevor, to be my bride would never be spoken. No—whether hopeless or not as to the final issue, here my heart was anchored; so that, failing the beloved woman who stood before me, I must go mateless to the end of my days.

Digitized by Google

Nellie's greeting was very quiet. Yet I fancied my coming gave her pleasure, for her cheek flushed and the old witch-smile played about her lips. Still, I use the word "woman" advisedly. For, even in the dim light of the porch, I was conscious of a change in her—of something lost, yet something gained and added; of a greater poise, a greater dignity, for hers was—may I not say *is*, and that how thankfully?—one of those natures which experience and trial serve to mature and enrich rather than to break.—Would there were more of such; for are they not the salt of the earth, the divinely given leaven which, unto strength, courage, righteousness, leavens the whole lump? Ah! what a wife for my dear, weak, wayward, noble boy, Hartover!—Or, he being free no longer, what a wife for——

Sternly I put that thought from me. To indulge it would be to sink myself in intoxicating dreams and visions, drench my senses with sweet poison, emasculate my reason and my will—in a word, unman myself. Since her presence affected me even more profoundly than I anticipated, I must, in honour, arm myself against the delight of it with all the fortitude and prudence I possessed.

We had passed straight from the porch into the main living-room of the house, a large hall with a heavily timbered ceiling and a big open fireplace at the further end. Some logs burned cheerfully upon the hearth—a not unwelcome sight after my long drive in the drizzling mist. Here sweet-faced Miss Ann Braithwaite, in quakerish grey gown and close

Digitized by Google

net cap, received me with kindly speech. Everything spoke of the same easy circumstances and solid comfort, along with an exquisite cleanliness very pleasant to the eye and touch.

At supper Nellie performed her duties as hostess with a pretty solicitude and dignity; and the evening passed in talk, Braithwaite glad enough, I think, to hold forth once more on social reform, national and political subjects. He certainly talked well and to the point—his views humorously and, I must add, enlighteningly different to those I was accustomed to hear set forth in College Common-rooms or at the High Table in Hall. But I fancied his radicalism sounded a less temperate and genial note, and that he looked anxiously at Nellie from time to time. His manner to her was peculiarly gentle, and he referred to her opinion with an almost wistful desire to interest her in our conversation.

I had no opportunity of speaking with her alone that night, for which I was not altogether sorry. Better to wait until the first sweet torment of her nearness had worn off, and I had schooled myself to accept it without nervousness.

I rose to a day as brilliantly fair as yesterday had been wet. Sunshine and fresh air pervaded the house. A side door, in the hall—where breakfast awaited me—stood open on to the garden, the moat, and avenue of oaks climbing the gentle grass slope beyond to the sky-line.

After breakfast Braithwaite went out on to his farm, and Miss Ann retired to attend to some house-

Digitized by Google

hold business. Nellie, an all-round blue apron tied over her light gown and a white sunbonnet upon her head, stood at the table gathering scraps of broken food into a bowl. She was going, so she told me, to feed some broods of young chickens in the Orchard Close; and, on my asking permission to go with her, seemed pleased to have my company. As we passed out of the porch into the morning sunshine, I could not but exclaim at the peaceful charm of the place.

"Yes," she said. "It is peaceful—almost too peaceful, perhaps. But my father does not feel that. He has plenty to occupy him. The land had been neglected and the farm buildings suffered to fall into decay before we came; and you know his energy in making improvements and setting things to rights—working himself and making, not only his labourers, but nature itself work for and with him."

She glanced at me with a smile of tender amusement.

"He is happy here," she added.

"And you?" I asked, perhaps unwisely.

"If he is happy, I am content," she answered. "He is the best father living, and—his will is mine, dear Mr. Brownlow. It ought to be so, for he is most indulgent to me. There is nothing I could ask for which he would not give me if he could."

And she paused.

"If he could?" I repeated, for it struck me she alluded to a subject which must be in both

Digitized by Google

our minds, and about which she might be glad to speak.

"Yes," she said; "there are things—or at least there is one thing he cannot give me, because it is—or rather was—against his principles and judgment, against his conviction of what is wise and right. And now——"

Again she paused.

"Now it is too late."

She moved forward quickly and opened the door leading into the Orchard Close—some half acre of ancient turf, in which grew fine old fruit trees, apple, pear, plum, cherry and shining leafed walnut. The pears were already in blossom, their pyramids and wreaths of powdery white seen, overhead, against the radiant blue. High brick walls, mellow with age and encrusted in places with lichens of every tint from vivid orange to delicate grey, enclosed the place. Hen-coops were set out upon the warm short grass, over which a busy population of yellow chicks and ducklings scampered towards us—their mothers and foster-mothers, meanwhile, craning ruffled necks between the wooden bars of the coops, with distracted callings and cluckings.

With a wooden spoon Nellie scattered the food among them from her bowl, looking down at the pretty, clean, scrambling little creatures—both she, they, the blossoming trees, and ruddy walls making a charming picture. But a change had come over her. The smile, the play of feature, vanished. The cheek seemed to sharpen, the dark line under the

Digitized by Google

eyes to darken yet more. A settled sadness seemed to touch her. Was it thus she looked when she had not to amuse her father, when she had not to put a force upon herself, and feign cheerfulness for the sake of those about her—when she found herself alone, in short?

Vain heart of mine!—for was this not a confession that she dare be herself before me, that I was privileged to witness what she hid from others? There was a compression about the lips now, a kindling of the eyes, which told me she was coming straight to the point, like the fine and fearless woman she was—but I little expected to what point.

She set down the bowl upon the grass, where the greedy chicks swarmed over and into it, and thrusting her hand within the bosom of her dress drew out a letter.

"This reached me a week ago," she said. "I could not show it to my father, nor to dear Aunt Ann. Had you not been coming, I must have written to you, Mr. Brownlow. Suspense was intolerable; and, if you yourself knew, I was sure you would tell me the truth."

She put the letter into my hand. I recognised the writing at once, and with a feeling of shame and sorrow, amounting almost to horror, looked her in the face. God! how glorious it was in its agony—courage which could meet anything which must be; act on anything which was right; and, with all, such invincible sweetness!

I read the letter.

Digitized by Google

"SILLY COUNTRY GIRL—Listen to me, and cease to follow what you will never win and try to reach honours which belong to bolder hearts than yours. You are thrown aside and done with, like his old glove, his old shoe. Know, then—but do not tell it, for the day you do tell shall be the last safe one of your life—that he is married already; and to me, who am far cleverer than you, and can please him better, love him better than you, ignorant little peasant, could ever please or love."

"Devil!" was all I said, as I finished this melodramatic effusion, for anger and disgust choked me.

"It is so then?"—from Nellie, watching me.

"You asked me to be truthful?—It is. I know the handwriting too well."

"Whose is it?" she asked, in a low but steady voice.

"That of the person—the Frenchwoman—whom he has married."

"Mademoiselle Fédore, who used to be at Hover?"

"Mademoiselle Fédore."

She raised her head, standing stiffly erect, her whole form tense and rigid for a moment. I could not speak. What comfort could I offer? Her grief was too sacred for me to profane it with any chance words of sympathy. I could only admire, reverence, —aye, and worship—before this martyrdom of true love.

At last: "I believed it. Yes—I was sure from the first. But it is very cruel. I have not deserved that

Digitized by Google

insult. Whom have I followed? What honours have I tried to reach? I have striven, dear Mr. Brownlow, not even to think of him. Ever since my father forbade me to see him, or hold any sort of intercourse with him, there was but one thing to do —to obey. And I have obeyed. God knows that I have. You believe me?"

She glanced up in my face with something of the old witch-smile. My eyes answered yes. I dared not trust myself to speak. She looked down again on to the smooth turf and soft, scrambling, peeping chickens.

"Tell me—I only saw her once, and saw she was very handsome. But is she—is she worthy of him?"

"Do not ask me," I said, weakly perhaps; but I was hard pressed, wellnigh desperate. "Judge for yourself of the nature of the woman who could write such a letter."

"No, if I begin to judge, if I begin to fancy, I should go—it is wrong, it is wicked of me—but I feel, at times, I should go mad."

She was silent again, looking down. Then:

"God forgive her—for this letter has undone the work of months. Ever since we left Yorkshire, and came here to Westrea, I have struggled for my father's sake, for Aunt Ann's—and for my own pride's sake too—to put the thought of him out of my mind, and interest myself in books, in my father's schemes, and in my own home duties. I believed I had conquered myself, conquered my—my love. But

Digitized by Google

this letter brought back all the pain, and stirred up something violent and evil in me—something I have never felt before. It is degrading. I am jealous, dear Mr. Brownlow—jealous. Do you know what that means?"

Alas! did I not know?—and most bitterly!

"But of course you do not. How should you?" she went on.

How should I indeed?—And she smiled at me in lovely apology, thereby cutting me to the quick. For did not her words, her look, show how wholly innocent and ignorant she was of all personal feeling on my part?

Well, and if so, what had I to complain of? Earlier, had it not been an integral element in that mystic, fantastic inner life of mine, to conceive of her loving the dear boy as deeply, eternally, even though as hopelessly, as I loved her? Now that my conception proved true in fact, what cause had I to be hurt, and to shrink? Was it not inconsistent, illogical, a very height of unreason? I took myself to task for my folly; but I suffered. Meanwhile an idea occurred to me, but I dared not put it into execution yet. In Fédore's letter was one lie which could and, in justice to the dear boy, ought to be refuted. But I must wait until I could judge better of Nellie's powers of endurance, and better trust my own calmness and nerve in handling a very delicate subject.

Now I only said to her:

"Will you trust me with this letter, and let me keep it for the present?"

Digitized by Google

"Why?"

"Because—forgive me if I seem to preach to you—as long as it remains in your possession, you cannot, I think, but read and re-read it."

"That is true," she said.

"And each time you do so, you renew your own pain, renew—quite naturally—your sense of injury, of anger at the insult offered you. Yet this renewal works to no good end. It is useless, merely causing you to move in a vicious circle, since it cannot alter the facts or affect the result."

"Yes—yes," she said. "Ah! how well you understand, dear Mr. Brownlow! Keep the letter. It is better out of my possession. And I feel less unhappy now that I have spoken to you. I longed for, yet dreaded, your coming. I knew that I should want to tell you of this—to speak freely to you; and yet I doubted if it were possible to talk on such a subject without seeming wanting in modesty. But you have made it easy by your sympathy—which I feel. It is wonderful. And I am very grateful—more grateful than I can express."

For the first time her eyes had tears in them, and her brave lips quivered. I could bear no more. I turned and walked away a few steps, the sunshine gay among the pear blossoms above my head, warm upon the turf at my feet. Ah, dear God, what a beautiful world—and I to go through it lonely all the days of my life!

Nellie picked up her bowl and came after me, a wistfulness in her sweet face.

Digitized by Google

"What is the matter, dear Mr. Brownlow? I have not offended you?" she said.

"No—ten thousand times, no," I answered. "But the times are somewhat out of joint, and—well—would to Heaven I were a better, abler man to set them right!"

Just then Braithwaite hailed us from the doorway. We joined him and, with him, went back to the house.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXX

THAT was the first of many days—for by both Braithwaite's and Nellie's request I stayed on at Westrea until nearly the end of the vacation—of sweet but very searching experience. If I played with fire it was a purifying fire surely, burning away the baser metal and leaving whatever of gold might be in me free of dross.

Not that I say this boastfully—who am I, indeed, to boast?—but humbly and thankfully, knowing I passed through an ordeal from which—while the animal man cowered and shrank, crying aloud, aye, and with tears of agony, to be spared—the spiritual man drew strength and rose, in God's mercy, to greater fulness of life. For I learned very much, and that at first hand, by personal experiment, not by hearsay merely or, parrot-like, by rote. Learned the truth of the apostle's dictum, that although "all things are lawful," yet, for some of us, many things, however good in themselves or good for others, are "not expedient." Learned, too, the value of the second best, learned to accept the lower place. Learned to rejoice in friendship, since the greater joys of love were denied me, schooling myself to play a brother's part; play it fearlessly and, as I trust, unselfishly, watchful that neither by word, or deed, or even by look, I overstepped the limit I had

Digitized by Google

set myself and forfeited the trust and faith Nellie reposed in me.

To do this was no easy matter. At moments, I own, the springs of courage and resolution ran perilously dry. Then I would go away by myself for a time; and—why should I hesitate to tell it?—pray, wrestle in prayer, for self-mastery which, with that wrestling, came. For if we are honest with ourselves and with Him, disdaining self-pity and self-excuse, Almighty God is very safe to fulfil His part of the bargain. This, also, I learned, during those sweet and searching days at Westrea, beyond all question of doubt.

I rode or drove with Braithwaite about the neighbouring country. Walked with him over his farm. Talked with him endlessly of his agricultural schemes and improvements. Talked with him about public events, too, and about politics. Only once or twice was Hartover, or Hover, mentioned; and then, I observed, his tone took on a certain bitterness. He had been up to Yorkshire on business a little prior to my visit, had happened to run across Warcop—aged and sad, so he told me. But my old friend laid aside much of his customary caution, it appeared, on hearing Braithwaite expected shortly to see me, and bade him tell me things were not well at Hover.

"What he actually knows, what he only suspects, I could not quite discover," Braithwaite went on. "But I gathered the Countess has been up to queer tricks. As to that business, now, of the Italian rascal going off with the plate—you heard of it?—well, it

Digitized by Google

looks uncommonly as though my lady was in no haste to have him laid by the heels—bamboozled the police, as she bamboozles pretty well every unlucky wretch she comes across, until he had time to make good his escape."

"And the Colonel?" I asked.

"A dark horse. Connived at the fellow's escape, too, I am inclined to think. Marsigli knew too much of the family goings-on, and, if he was caught, was pretty sure to blab in revenge. I am not given to troubling myself about the unsavoury doings of great folks, Brownlow. They had a short way with aristocratic heads during the French Revolution at the end of last century, and I am not altogether sure they weren't right. But for my poor Nellie's sake, I should never give that Longmoor faction a second thought. As it is I have been obliged to think about them, and I believe the plain English of the whole affair is that the Colonel and my lady have been on better terms than they should be for many years past. What she wants is a second Lord Longmoor as husband, and the money, and the property, and—a son of her own to inherit it. An ugly accusation? Yes. But can you spell out the mystery any better way than that?"

I did not know that I could, and told him so. There the conversation dropped, while my mind went back to the letter Nellie had shown me.—It was a devilish action of Fédore's, I thought, the mark of a base, cruel nature, capable—the last sin—of trampling on the fallen. And yet might it not have been

Digitized by Google

dictated by the pardonable desire to secure her prize for herself, to prevent pursuit, inquiry, scandal, perhaps fresh misery for Nellie? There are two sides, two explanations, of every human act; and the charitable one is just as rational, often more so, than the uncharitable. If she stated her case somewhat coarsely, was she not low-bred, ill-taught, excited by success?

Thus did I argue with myself, trying to excuse the woman, lest I should let anger get the upper hand of reason and judgment. But what was her relation to Marsigli? This it was which really mattered, which was of lasting moment. And about this I must be silent, be cool and prudent. At present I could take no action. I must wait on events.

Meanwhile each day brought me a closer acquaintance with, and respect for, Nellie's character; the liveliness of her intelligence, and justness of her taste. And to it, the intellectual side of her nature, I made my appeal, trying to take her mind off personal matters and interest her in literature and thought. On warm mornings, her household duties finished, she would bring her needlework out to a sheltered spot in the garden, where the high red-brick wall formed an angle with the house front; and sitting there, the flowers, the brimming water, the gently upward sloping grass-land and avenue of oaks before us, I would read aloud to her from her favourite authors or introduce her to books she had not yet read. On chill evenings we would sit beside the wood fire in the hall, while Braithwaite was busy with the news-

Digitized by Google

paper or accounts, and read till the dying twilight obliged her to rise and light the lamp. Much of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, along with Pope's rendering of the Iliad, Hazlitt's Lectures and Lamb's Essays, we studied thus. Shelley, save for a few of the lyrics, we avoided by tacit consent; and Byron likewise, with the exception of certain portions of "Childe Harold"; the heroic rather than the sentimental note seeming safest—though from different causes—to us both.

Often I would illustrate our reading by telling her about the authors, the places, or the period with which it dealt, to see her hands drop in her lap, her face grow bright, her manner animated, as she listened and questioned me—argued a little too, if she differed from my opinion. Sometimes she laughed with frank enjoyment at some merry tale or novel idea. And then I was indeed rewarded—only too well rewarded. For her laughter was exquisite to me, both in sound and in token of—were it but momentary—lightness of heart.

After that first morning in the Orchard Close, we rarely mentioned the dear boy. I felt nothing could be gained by leading the conversation in his direction. If it would afford her relief, if she wanted to speak, she knew by now, I felt, she could do so without embarrassment or fear of misunderstanding on my part. But it was not until the afternoon of the day preceding my return to Cambridge that we had any prolonged talk on the subject.

Braithwaite, I remember, had driven over to Thet-

Digitized by Google

ford upon business; and, at Nellie's request, I walked with her to the village, so that she might show me the fine old monuments and brasses in the parish church.

Coming back across the fields, we lingered a little, watching the loveliness of the early May sunset. For, looking westward, all the land lay drenched in golden haze, which—obliterating the horizon line—faded upward into a faint golden-green sky, across which long webs were drawn of rose and grey. Out of the sunset a soft wind blew; full, as it seemed, of memory and wistful invitation to—well—I know not what. But either that wind or consciousness of our parting on the morrow moved Nellie to open her heart to me more freely than ever before.

"Dear Mr. Brownlow," she said, her eyes still fixed on that loveliness of sunset—"I want to thank you now, while we are still alone, for all you have done for me. You have, indeed, been a good physician, and I want you to know how much better I am since you came—stronger, and more at peace. I promise you I will do my utmost to keep the ground I have gained, and not fall back into the unworthy state of mind out of which you have brought me. I do not say I am cured."

She looked up at me, smiling.

"I do not think you would ask that of me. I have no wish to be—I should, I think, be ashamed to be cured of—of my love. For it would make what was most beautiful seem unreal and untrue. But I am resigned to all—almost all—which has happened.

Digitized by Google

I no longer kick against the pricks, or ask to have things otherwise. I shall not let it make me sour or envious—thanks to you."

And as she spoke I read in her dear eyes a depth of innocent and trustful affection, which was almost more than I could endure.

"I have come to a better frame of mind," she said. "It will last. It shall last, I promise you."

"Then all is well," I answered haltingly.

But as I spoke her expression changed. She walked forward along the field path, looking upon the ground.

"Yes, all—I suppose—is well," she repeated. "All except one thing—that hurts still."

"And what is that one thing?"

I thought I knew. If I was right, I had a remedy at hand—a desperate one, perhaps, but she was firm enough to bear it now.

"I always felt how little I had to offer, as against his position, his gifts, and all the attractions of his life at Hover, and still more his life in town. The wonder was he should ever have found me worth caring for at all. But I thought his nature was deeper and more constant, and it hurts—it must always hurt—that he should have forgotten so soon and so entirely as she—his wife—says he has."

"There she lied. He has not forgotten," I answered. "Here are Hartover's own words."

And I gave her the letter I received after my visit to Chelsea. Let her learn the truth, the whole truth, as from his own lips—learn the best and the worst

Digitized by Google

of him, and so meet whatever the future might bring with open eyes.

Some twenty yards ahead a stile and gate divided the field of spring wheat we were crossing from the pasture beyond. I must leave Nellie to herself. So I went on and stood, leaning my elbows on the top bar of the gate.

Below, in the hollow, the red roofs and chimneys of Westrea and a glint of water showed through the veil of golden haze. An abode of peace, of those wholesome fruitful industries which link man to mother-earth and all her ancient mysteries of the seasons, of seed-time and harvest, rain and shine. How far away in purpose and sentiment from the gaudy world of fashion, of artificial excitement, intrigue and acrimonious rivalries, to which my poor boy, Hartover, now belonged! Yes, and therefore, since here her lot was cast, it was well Nellie should know the best and worst of him, his weakness and his fine instincts alike; because—because—in the back of my mind was a conviction, irrational, unfounded, very foolish perhaps, but at this moment absolute, that the end was not yet. And that, in the end, by ways which I knew not, once again Nellie would find Hartover, and Hartover would find Nellie, and finding her would find rest to his soul, salvation to his wayward nature, and thus escape the fate of Alcibiades, which I had always so dreaded for him, and prove worthy of his high station, his great possessions, his singular beauty, charm and talent, even yet.

For five minutes, nearly ten minutes, while the gold

Digitized by Google

faded to grey, I waited, and Nellie gave no sign. I began to grow nervous and question the wisdom of my own action. To her, pure and high-minded as she was, would this revelation of dissipation and hard-living, prove too painful, would she turn from it in anger and disgust? Had I betrayed my trust, been disloyal to the dear boy in letting her see his confession? I bowed my head upon my hands. Fool, fool, thus to rush in where angels might truly fear to tread!

Then quick, light footsteps behind me—the rustle of a woman's dress. And as, fearful and humiliated, I, turning, looked up, Nellie's eyes were like stars, her face pale but glorious in its exaltation and triumphant tenderness.

"Dear good physician," she said, "I am really cured at last—not of, but by love. All that seemed spoilt and lost is given back. How can I thank you enough? I can bear to be away from him, bear to give him up, now that I know he really cared for me, really suffered in leaving me. I can even forgive her, though she has been cruel and insolent, because she went to him in his trouble and helped to save his life. And I understand why he married her—it was chivalrous and generous on his part. It places him higher in my estimation. I can admire him in that too."

I gazed at her, dazzled, enchanted, wondering. And then—shame, thrice shame to me after all my struggles, resolutions, prayers—the devil of envy raised its evil head, of bitterness against the rich man, who with all his gold and precious stones, his

Digitized by Google

flocks and herds, must yet steal the poor man's one jewel, one little ewe lamb.

"Have you read all the letter—read that part in which he speaks of his first months in London?" I asked.

For an instant she looked at me without comprehension, her eyebrows drawn together, in evident question and surprise. Then the tension relaxed. Gently and sweetly she laughed.

"Ah! yes," she said. "I know. He grew reckless—he did wrong. But—but, dear Mr. Brownlow—is it wicked of me?—I cannot condemn him for that—because it was his love for me which drove him to it. He tells you so himself. I suppose I ought to be shocked—I will try to be—presently—if you say I ought. But not just yet—please not just yet."

"Neither now nor presently," I answered, conscience-stricken and ashamed. "You know far better than I what is right. Follow your own heart."

I opened the gate, and stood back for her to pass. As she did so she paused.

"You are displeased with me," she said. "Yet why? Why did you let me read his letter, except to comfort me and make me happy by showing me he was not to blame?"

Why indeed? She well might ask. And how was I to answer without still further betraying my trust—my trust to her, this time, since I had sworn to be to her as a brother and let no hint of my own feelings disturb the serenity of our intercourse.

So I replied, I am afraid clumsily enough—

Digitized by Google

"You are mistaken. And to show you how little I am displeased I beg you to keep this letter, in exchange for the one you gave me to keep. You may like to read it through again, from time to time."

I held it out. And for an instant she hesitated, her eyes fixed upon the writing, upon the paper, as though these actual and material things were precious in her sight. Then she put her hands behind her and shook her head.

"No—better not. It is not necessary," she said with a child-like gravity. Her whole attitude just now was curiously simple and childlike. "I have every word of it by heart already, dear Mr. Brownlow. I shall remember every word—always."

And for a while we walked on in silence, side by side, beneath the dying sunset. Upon the hump-backed bridge spanning the stream Nellie stopped.

"One thing more, good physician," she said, very gently. "I am cut off from him for—for ever by his marriage. But you can watch over him and care for his welfare still. You will do so?"

"Before God—yes," I answered.

"And, sometimes, you will let me hear, you will come and tell me about him?"

"Again—yes—before God."

And I smiled to myself, bowing my head. Oh! the magnificent and relentless egoism of love!—But she should have this since she asked it; this and more than this. Plans began to form in my mind, a determination to make sure, whatever it might cost me, about this same marriage of Hartover's. I would

Digitized by Google

devote myself to an inquiry, pursue it carefully, prudently; but pursue it regardless of time, regardless of money—such money, as by economy and hard work, I could command. For was not such an inquiry part, and an integral one, of the pledge to watch over Hartover and care for his welfare which I had so recently and solemnly given her? Undoubtedly it was.

"Thank you," she said. Then after a pause, "I wonder why you are so kind to me? Sometimes I am almost afraid of your kindness, lest it should make me selfish and conceited, make me think too highly of myself. Indeed I will try better to deserve it. I will read. I will improve my mind, so as to be more worthy of your society and teaching, when you come again.—But, Mr. Brownlow, I have never kept anything from my father until now. Is it deceitful of me not to tell him of these two letters? They would anger and vex him; and he has been so much happier and like his old self since you have been with us. I hate to disturb him and open up the past."

"I think you are, at least, justified in waiting for a time before telling him," I faltered.

For my poor head was spinning, and I had much ado to collect my wits. She would read, improve herself, be more worthy of my teaching when I came again, forsooth!—Ah! Nellie, Nellie, that I must listen with unmoved pedagogic countenance, that I must give you impersonal and sage advice, out of a broken heart!—

Digitized by Google

"Yes, wait," I repeated. "Later your course of action may be made clearer, and you may have an opportunity of speaking without causing him annoyance or distress. You are not disobeying his orders, in any case."

"Thank you," she said again. "See, the lamps are lit. My father must be home and we are late. Oh! how I wish you were not going away to-morrow. He will miss you, we shall all miss you so badly."

I did not sleep much that night.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ancient postboy drove out to Westrea next morning, and conveyed me and my impedimenta back to Cambridge.

The journey was a silent one, I being as little disposed for conversation as he. My thoughts were not very cheerful. Yet what had I, after all, to make a poor mouth about? I had asked to know my own mind, and arrive at a definite decision concerning certain matters closely affecting my future. Now I knew it very thoroughly; and, as to those matters, had decided once and for all. It only remained for me to acquaint my kind old friend, the Master, with that decision as tactfully and delicately as might be. But how should I acquit myself? And how would he take it? And how far should I be compelled to speak of Hartover and Nellie, and of my own relation to both, to make my meaning clear? For what a tangle it all was—a tangle almost humorous, though almost tragic too, as such human tangles mostly are! Well, I supposed I must stick to my old method of blunt truth-telling, leaving the event to my Maker, who, having created that strange anomaly, the human heart, must surely know how best to deal with its manifold needs and vagaries!

So far then, it was, after all, fairly plain sailing. But, unfortunately, these thoughts were not the only thing which troubled me.

Digitized by Google

For I felt as well as thought; and feeling is more dangerous than thought because at once more intimate and more intangible. A great emptiness filled —for emptiness can fill, just as silence can shout, and that hideously—not only my own soul but, as it seemed, all Nature around me. The land was empty, the sky empty. An east-wind blight spread abroad, taking all colour out of the landscape and warmth out of the sunshine. Just so had my parting with Nellie cast a blight over me, taking the colour and warmth out of my life. For I had been with her long enough for her presence, the sound of her voice, and constant sight of her to become a habit. How terribly I missed, and should continue to miss, her—not only in great matters but in small, in all the pleasant, trivial, friendly incidents of every day!

After the freshness and spotless cleanliness of Westrea, my college rooms—fond though I was of them—looked dingy and uncared for, as is too often the way of an exclusively masculine dwelling-place. The men had not come up yet, which spared me the annoyance of Halidane's neighbourhood for the moment. Still I felt the depressing lack of life and movement throughout the college buildings and quadrangles. Cambridge was asleep—a dull and dismal sleep, as it struck me. The Master, I found, was back and at the Lodge once more; but, since only a portion of the house was ready for habitation, Mrs. Dynevor and her daughters would remain at Bath for some weeks longer. This I was glad to hear, as it promised to simplify my rather awkward task.

Digitized by Google

I called at the Lodge the same evening, to be received by the Master with his usual cordiality. He invited me to stay and dine, admitting he felt somewhat lonely without his ladies in the still partially dismantled house.

"Unlike the three children in the Babylonian furnace, the smell of fire is very much upon it still," he said. "Signs and odours of destruction meet me at every turn. I dare say in the end—for I have an excellent architect—we shall make a more comfortable and certainly more sanitary place of it than ever before; but the continuity is broken, much history and many a tradition lost for good. I am only heartily glad you are not among the latter, Brownlow. It was a very near thing."

Whether this was intended to give me an opening for explanation, I could not say. In any case I did not choose to take advantage of it, preferring to explain at my own time and in my own way.

We talked on general subjects for a while. But at the end of dinner, when the butler left the room, he said, eyeing me with a twinkle—

"It was a pity you could not manage to meet us at Bath, Brownlow, for you would have found some old friends there. One of whom, a very splendid personage by the same token, made many gracious inquiries after you—put me through the longer catechism in respect of you, and put my sister and nieces through it also, I understand."

"Old friends?" I asked, considerably puzzled both by his words and manner.

Digitized by Google

"You had not heard, then, any more than I, that Lord Longmoor has settled permanently at Bath?"

I assured him I had not.

"Yes—and under sad enough circumstances," he went on, with a change of tone. "Poor gentleman, he and those about him have cried wolf for so many years that I, for one, had grown sceptical regarding his ailments. But what of constitution he ever possessed has been undermined by coddling and dosing. I was admitted once or twice, and was, I own, most painfully impressed by his appearance and by his state of mind—religious mania, or something alarmingly akin to it, and that of at once the most abject and arrogant sort."

I was greatly shocked by this news, and said so.

"What is being done?" I asked.

"Everything that common sense would forbid, in my opinion. He is surrounded by an army of obsequious servants and rapacious medical and religious quacks, all and each busy to secure their private advantage while fooling him, poor soul, to the top of his bent. Our hopeful convert and gownsman Halidane had joined the throng, so I heard, but fled at my approach. Where the carcass is, there the vultures are gathered together—a repulsive and odious sight, showing the case of Dives may after all be hardly less miserable than that of Lazarus."

The Master paused.

"Lady Longmoor is there too; and Heaven forgive me, Brownlow," he added, "I could not but

Digitized by Google

wonder what sentiments that remarkably fair lady really entertains towards her lord. She confided in me in the most charming manner; yet, honestly, I knew less what to think and believe, knew less how the land really lay, after receiving those confidences than before."

In spite of myself I was amused. For could I not picture Her Magnificence and my good, kind, old Master in solemn conclave? Picture the arts and graces let loose on him, the touching appeals, admissions, protests; the disarming innocence of glance and gesture, along with flashes of naughty laughter, beneath the black-fringed eyelids, in the demurely downcast eyes.

"Her ladyship's communications are not always easy to interpret. They are not always intended to enlighten—perhaps," I ventured.

"Then you too, have been honoured?"

"I have."

He chuckled.

But, in my case, amusement speedily gave place to sober reflection. For if Lord Longmoor was in so critical a condition, dying possibly, what an immense change in Hartover's position this entailed! All my fears for the dear boy reawakened. What means might not be taken to embroil him with his father, at this critical moment, to injure and dispossess him! Particularly did I dislike the fact that Halidane had been in attendance. I questioned the Master anxiously.

"Ah! there you have me, Brownlow," he replied.

Digitized by Google

"Lord Hartover is a point upon which my lady's confidences proved peculiarly obscure. She spoke of her 'dear George' with a great show of affection, deploring that the festivities in celebration of his coming of age next month must be postponed. She had so counted on seeing both you and me at Hover then, she declared. Deploring, also"—and he looked rather hard at me, I thought, across the corner of the dinner table over the row of decanters, as he spoke—"deploring also an unfortunate disposition in her stepson to become enamoured of young women very much beneath him in the social scale. She gave me to understand both she and his father had been caused much annoyance and trouble by more than one affair of this sort. Yet I could not help fancying she sought information, just then, rather than offered it. I had a notion—I may have been mistaken—she was doing her best to pump me and find out whether I had heard anything from you upon the subject of these amatory escapades. Come, Brownlow—for my instruction, not for hers—can you fill in the gaps?"

I hesitated. Had the right moment come for explanation? I believed that it had. And so, as plainly and briefly as I could, I told him the whole story. I kept back nothing—why should I? There was nothing to be ashamed of, though somewhat to grieve over, and much to regret. I told him of Nellie, of Fédore; of Hartover's love, Hartover's marriage. I told him of my own love.

For a while he remained silent. Then, laying his

Digitized by Google

hand on my shoulder, as I sat, my elbows upon the table, my face buried in my hands—

"My poor fellow, my poor fellow—I had no notion of all this," he said. "So this is the upshot of your two years at Hover. I sent you out to make your fortune, and you found your fate. Well—well—things are as they are; but I do not deny that recently I had formed very different plans for you."

"Do not think me presumptuous, sir, if I answer I feared as much. And that is my reason for telling you what I have told no other human being—what, indeed, I had hoped to keep locked inviolably in my own breast as long as I live."

Something in my tone or in my narrative must have stirred him deeply, for he rose and took a turn up and down the room, as though with difficulty retaining his composure. For my part, I own, I felt broken, carried out of myself. It had been searching work, dislocating work, to lay bare my innermost heart thus. But only so, as I judged, could the mention of Alice Dynevor's name be avoided between us. It was better to sacrifice myself, if by so doing I could at once spare her and arrive at a clear understanding. Of this I was glad. I think the Master was glad too; for, his rather agitated walk ended, he stood beside me and spoke most kindly.

"Your secret is perfectly safe with me, Brownlow, rest assured. I give you my word I will never reveal it. You have behaved honourably and high-mindedly throughout. Your conduct commands my respect and admiration,—though I could wish some matters

Digitized by Google

had turned out otherwise. But now as to this marriage—real or supposed—of poor Hartover's and all the ugly plotting of which, I fear with you, he is the victim. I do not think I can find it in my conscience to stand by, or encourage you to stand by, with folded hands."

"That is exactly what I was coming to, sir," I said, choking down alike my thanks and my emotion. "If, as you inform me, Lord Longmoor's health is so precarious, the poor dear boy's future must not be left to chance."

"No, no," he answered warmly. "His foes, I fear, are very literally of his own household. If this woman is legally his wife, we, as his friends, are called upon to stand by the marriage and on grounds of public policy, make the best of what, I admit, strikes me as a very bad business. If she is not legally his wife, if there is any flaw in the marriage, we must take means to establish the fact of that flaw and set him free. Whether he is grateful to us for our self-imposed labours affects our duty neither one way nor the other at this stage of the proceedings. But should she prove the unscrupulous person I take her to be, he will very certainly thank us in the end. And now, Brownlow, it occurs to me the sooner we move in all this the better. There is no time to be lost."

He gave me reasons for his opinion, in which I fully agreed; and we sat talking far into the night, with the result that within a fortnight I travelled, first to Yorkshire, and then up to town.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXII

ABOUT my Yorkshire journey it is unnecessary to say much. I saw Hover once more, stately as ever, but lifeless. The great house shut up, its many treasures swathed in dust sheets and brown paper. When it would be opened again none knew. Probably Colonel Esdaile would bring some gentlemen down in August for grouse-shooting, or for covert-shooting in October. He would hunt there during the winter. The Colonel, always and only the Colonel, as man in possession?

I said as much to Warcop—to whom my visit was made—sitting before the empty stove in that queer sanctum of his, hung round with prints and spoils of the stud-farm and the chase. Whereupon he stuck out his bull-dog under jaw and mournfully shook his big grizzled head.

Yes, he answered, that was pretty well what it all came to. Would to God it did not!—always and only Colonel Jack at Hover in these days. And my lord lay a-dying, so they said, at Bath; and my young lord gave no sign. And her ladyship flitted in, like some great bright-painted butterfly, for a day and a night. Looked round the stables and gardens with a laugh, hanging on the Colonel's arm, and flitted off again, as gay as you please, to London or Bath, or Old Nick knew where; while Colonel Jack, with a

Digitized by Google

face like thunder and a temper like tinder, cursed the very guts out of anyone unlucky enough to cross his path for full twenty-four hours afterwards. Colonel Esdaile was a changed man, as I gathered; his swaggering manner and jovial good-humour, a thing of the past, save at rare intervals or when her ladyship happened to be about.

All of which was bad hearing. The more so as, without going all lengths with Braithwaite in his condemnation of our hereditary nobility, I believed then —and believe firmly still—that if a great nobleman, or great landowner, is to justify his position—aye, and his very existence—he must live on his estate, keep in close touch with, and hold himself directly responsible for the welfare of, all ranks of its population—labourers, artisans, rent-payers great and small, alike. The middle-man, however just or able an administrator, introduces, and must always introduce, a cold-blooded, mechanical relation as between landlord and tenant, employer and employed. And, now listening to Warcop's lament, I trembled lest the curse of absenteeism—which during recent years has worked such havoc of class hatred and disaffection in Ireland—should set its evil mark upon this English country-side.

In this connection it was inevitable that memories of my former dreams and ambitions for Hover should come back to me with a bitter sense of failure and of regret. Dreams and ambitions of so educating and training my dear pupil as to make him an ideal landowner, an ideal nobleman, to whom no

Digitized by Google

corner of his vast possessions, the lives lived and work done there, would be a matter of indifference; but who would accept and obey the divinely ordained law of rulership and ownership which reminds us every privilege carries with it a corresponding obligation, and that the highest duty of him who governs is to serve.

Where had all those fair dreams and ambitions departed now? Were they for ever undone and dissipated? It seemed so, alas! Yet who could tell? Had I not promised Nellie, and that in some sort against my dearest interests, to watch over Hartover to the best of my power, and care for him still? And if a poor faulty human creature, such as I, could be faithful, how much more God, his Maker! Yes, I would set my hope, both for him and for Hover, firmly there, black though things looked at present. For Almighty God, loving him infinitely more than I —much though I loved him—would surely find means for his redemption, and, notwithstanding his many temptations, still make for him a way of escape.

And with that I turned my mind resolutely to the practical inquiry which had brought me north, questioning Warcop concerning the disappearance of Marsigli and the theft, with which he stood charged, of jewels and of plate.

Warcop's first words in reply, I own, set my heart beating.

"Best ask French Mamzelle, sir," he said, with a snarl. "For, as sure as my name's Jesse Warcop,

Digitized by Google

she'd the main finger in that pie. Picked out t' fattest o' the plums for herself, too, and fathered the job upon Marsigli to rid herself of the fellow."

"To rid herself of him?"

"'Od, an' why not? So long as ye were here wi' us, sir, what she'd set her mind to have was out of her reach. But, you safe gone, she'd na more stomach for my lord's Italian butler, bless you—must fly at higher game than that."

"Lord Hartover?"

"And who else? Eh! but she's a canny one; none of your hot-heads, rushing into a thing afore they've fairly planned it. She'd her plan pat enough. Laid her train or ever she struck a match; waited till she kenned it was all over between t' dear lad and Braithwaite's lass. Had Marsigli muzzled, seeing that to tell on her was to tell on himself. And others, that should ha' shown her up, durstn't do it, lest she opened her mouth and set scandal yelping after them. So she'd a muzzle onto them too, and could afford to laugh t' whole lot in the face—upstairs as well as down—and follow her own fancy."

He ruminated, chewing viciously at the straw he carried in his mouth.

"And, as the talk goes, she's followed it to a finish," he added, "and fixed her devil she-kite's claws in my young lord, poor dear lad, safe enough. Is the talk true, sir?"

I answered, sadly, I feared it was so; but that, as some method might still possibly be found of unfix-

Digitized by Google

ing those same kite's claws, I had come in search of any information he could give.

"Then you mean to put up a fight, sir?" he said, his jaw hard and his eyes bright. "For all your colleging and your black coat, you're o' the same kidney as when ye rode t' little brown horse across the fells and saved t' pack."

And therewith he settled down to recount all he had puzzled out, all he believed and thought. Inferential rather than circumstantial, this, alas! for the most part; yet to me valuable, from the man's caution, honesty, power of close observation, shrewd intelligence and mother-wit. In his opinion the theft had been carried out at Fédore's instigation, and upon her undertaking to join Marsigli as soon as it was accomplished, and fly with him to his native city of Milan. Having thus involved the Italian—whose long-standing passion for, and jealousy of her, were matters of common knowledge among the servants, Warcop said—she evidently played him false, although covering his escape by putting the police on a wrong scent. Where was he now? In England, Warcop opined, probably hiding in London, still hoping to induce Fédore to redeem her promise. Were the two man and wife? Over that Warcop shook his head. Who could say, save the two themselves? Yet, if they were, there must needs be a record of the marriage, which would have taken place during the period of my tutorship at Hover, at some time when her ladyship was in Grosvenor Square.

Digitized by Google

Here, at last, I had a definite starting-point. For the church could be found, the clergyman who performed the ceremony could be found, always supposing any such ceremony had really taken place.

I returned to Cambridge to talk everything over with the Master; and subsequently journeyed up to town, where, under seal of the strictest secrecy, I placed matters in the hands of Inspector Lavender, of the Detective Police. He must find the church, the clergyman—above all, must find Marsigli.—This was a desperate game to play. I knew it. Would the dear boy ever forgive me for interfering in his affairs thus? I knew not. But I did know it had to be risked both for his fortune and his honour's sake. Further, was I not bound by my word solemnly given to Nellie? Still more, then, had it to be done for my own oath's sake.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXIII

AND now we were well on into the May term. The noble elms towers of dense and solid green; lilac and laburnum giving place to roses in the Fellows' Garden; and the river, a little shrunken by the summer heat, slipping past smooth lawns and beneath the weeping willows' graceful shade with truly academic deliberation and repose.

Never had I enjoyed my daily work so much, or met with so hearty and intelligent a response. An excellent set of men were in college that year; gentlemanlike, eager to learn, in some cases notably clever, in almost all agreeable to deal with. My popularity—enhanced by that episode of the fire at the Master's Lodge—was great. Why should I hesitate to say so, since thankfulness rather than vanity did, I can honestly affirm, fill my heart? I had arranged to take a reading party to North Wales during the long vacation, and to this I looked forward as a new and interesting experience. Halidane, moreover, for cause unknown, had ceased from troubling me. Ever since his return, at the beginning of term, he had worn a somewhat hang-dog look; and, though almost cringingly civil when we chanced to meet, appeared, as I thought, to shun rather than seek my society. What had happened to the fellow? Had the change in his demeanour any connection

Digitized by Google

with the Master's visit to his "sainted patron," Lord Longmoor, at Bath? I did not know, nor did I greatly care, so long as I continued to be relieved of his officious and unsavoury attentions.

And so, taking things all round, it seemed to me, just now, the lines had after all fallen to me in pleasant places. Temptation had been resisted, difficulties overcome, honour—and my conscience—satisfied. If much had been denied, yet much remained—sufficient, and more than sufficient, to make life a gift, not only good but glad—though after, perhaps, a somewhat serious pattern.

Then came an afternoon the events of which stand out very forcibly in my memory. They marked a turning-point; a parting of the ways, abrupt as it was unexpected.

For, neglecting alike the attractions of the glorious weather and of "the boats"—it was during the June races—I stayed in my rooms to look through a set of mathematical papers. Some pleased me by their ability. Others amused—or irritated—me by their blunders. Heavens, what thick heads some of those youngsters had! After about an hour's work, lulled by the stillness and the sunny warmth—droning of bees in the clematis below my window, chippering cries and glancing flight of swallows back and forth to their nests under the parapet above—I laid aside the papers, and, leaning back in my chair, sank into a brown study.

The morning's post had brought me a brief communication from Lavender, the detective. After

Digitized by Google

weeks of silent pursuit he had reason to believe he was on Marsigli's track at last. My own sensations in face of this announcement surprised me a little. By all rules of the game I should of course have felt unalloyed gratification. But did I really feel that? With a movement of shame, I was obliged to confess I did not. For a certain moral indolence had overtaken me. I was established in a routine from which I had no wish to break away. My college work, into which I threw myself at first mainly as a refuge from haunting desires and disturbing thoughts, had become an end in itself. It engrossed me. I found it restful—in that, while making small demand on my emotions, it gave scope for such talents, whether intellectual or practical, as I possessed. I found it exhilarating to deal with these young men, in the first flush of their mental powers, to—in some measure at all events—form their minds, influence their conduct and their thought. It was delightful, moreover, to have time and opportunity for private study; to read books, and ever more books. The scholar's life, the life of the university, held me as never before. Hence this obtrusion of Lavender, hunter of crime and of criminals, this obtrusion of wretched Marsigli, the absconding Italian butler, were, to be honest, displeasing rather than welcome. I cried off further demands upon my energies in the direction of conflict and adventure. Leave the student to his library, the teacher to his lecture-room, unvexed by the passions and tumult of the world without.

Digitized by Google

In fastidious repulsion, in something, Heaven forgive me, approaching disgust, I turned away from both thief and thief-catcher, all they were and all they stood for, as beneath my notice, common and unclean. Almost angrily I prayed to be let alone, let be. Prayed no fresh exertion might be required of me; but that I might pursue my course, as a comfortable, well-read, well-fed Cambridge don, in security and peace.

And, mercifully, my lazy prayer was not heard, not answered; or, more truly, was both heard and answered, though in a manner conspicuously the reverse of my intention in offering it.

For, as I mused thus, the calm of the summer afternoon was disturbed by a sudden loud knocking at my door. The door was flung open. On the threshold a man stood. No learned brother fellow, no ordinary gownsman; but, with his pride of bearing, his air of fashion, the finest young fine gentleman I had ever seen—in long drab driving coat, smartly outstanding from the waist, and white top hat with rakish up-curled brim.

For an instant I gazed in stupid amazement. Then, as the door closed behind him and he came from out the shadow, I sprang to my feet and ran forward, with a cry. And, almost before I knew what was happening, his two hands gripped my shoulders, and he backed me into the full light of the window, holding me away from him at arms' length and looking down into my face. He was a good half head taller than I.

Digitized by Google

"Dearest Brownlow—my dear old man, my dear old man," he repeated, and his grip tightened while his voice was tender as a girl's.

Then, while I stammered in my excitement and surprise, he gave a naughty little laugh.

"Oh! I am no ghost," he said. "You needn't be afraid. I'm very solid flesh and blood; worse luck for you, perhaps, old man. Gad, but it's good, though, to see you once again."

He threw down his hat among the papers on the table, tossed his gloves into it, and drew me on to the window-seat beside him.

Already the spell began to work, the spell of his extraordinary personal charm. Already he captivated me, firing my somewhat sluggish imagination. Already I asked nothing better than to devote myself to him, spend myself for him, stamp out the evil and nourish the good in him, at whatever loss or disadvantage to myself.

I inquired what had brought him to Cambridge.

"I am in trouble, Brownlow," he answered simply, while his face hardened. "It's an ugly sort of trouble, which I have not the pluck to meet single-handed. I cannot see my way through or out of it. I tell you, it was beginning to make me feel rather desperate. And I remembered your wisdom of old"——

He smiled at me, patting my knee.

"So, as I do not want to take to drink—which last night seemed the only alternative—I took the road this morning instead, and came to look for you.

Digitized by Google

Perhaps it is a rather presumptuous proceeding on my part. I have no claim on you, for I have been neglectful and selfish. I know that well enough—not by any means a model pupil, dear old man, not any great credit to you. But you cared for me once."

Cared for him? God was my witness that I did!

"And, as I tell you, I have not courage to meet this trouble alone. It raises a devil suspicion and anger in me. I am afraid of being unjust, of losing my head and doing some wild thing I shall regret for the rest of my life. But we need not go into all this just yet, and spoil our first half-hour together. It will keep."

And he looked away, avoiding my eyes with a certain shyness, as I fancied; glanced round the room, at its sober colouring, solid furniture, ranges of book-shelves and many books; glanced through the window at the fine trees, the bright garden, and quiet river glistening in the still June sunlight.

"Gad! but what a delightful place!" he said. "I am glad to know where you live, Brownlow, and I could find it in my heart to envy you, I think. The wheels must run very smooth."

I thought of Nellie, of my home-coming from Westrea. Verily, less smooth than he imagined—sometimes.

"Why, why did not they let me come here," he broke out—"as I implored them to, after the row about—about—at Hover, I mean, when you left me. I would have given anything to come up to the

Digitized by Google

university then, and work, and have you with me still. Ah! how different everything would be now! But my father refused to listen. The plan did not suit some people's book, I suppose; and they worked upon him, making him hopelessly obstinate. Nothing would do, but into the Guards I must go. I begged for if only a year with you here, at Cambridge, first. But not a bit of it. Out they pitched me, neck and crop, into the London whirlpool, to sink or swim as I could—sink for choice, I fancy, as far as they were concerned."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It is to be hoped they are better satisfied at the result than I am," he added, with an oath. "But what is done is done—and, curse it, there is no going back. As you make your bed—or as others make it for you—so must you lie on it."

Sad words from a boy of barely one-and-twenty, as I thought. Surely punishment awaited those, somewhere and somewhen, who had taught him so harsh a lesson, and taught it him so young.

Meanwhile, my first surprise and excitement over, I watched Hartover carefully, fearing to see in him signs of past dissipation and excess. But his beauty was as great as ever. His flesh firm, moreover, his eyes and skin clear. He had matured rather than altered, grown considerably taller and filled-out, though his figure remained gracefully alert and slight. Two points only did I observe which I did not quite like—namely an aspect of anxiety and care upon the brow, and little bitter lines at the corners

Digitized by Google

of the handsome mouth, giving a singular arrogance to his expression when the face was in repose.

We talked for a while of indifferent matters, and he asked me to walk with him to the Bull Hotel, where he had left the post-chaise in which he drove down from town, and where he invited me to dine with him and stay the night as his guest.

"Give me what time you can, Brownlow," he said. "Leave all the good boys, the white sheep of your numerous flock, to take care of themselves for once; and look after the bad boy, the black sheep—the scapegoat, rather. For, upon my soul, it amounts to that. The sins of others are loaded on to my unhappy head, I promise you, with a vengeance."

I could not but be aware of curious and admiring glances, as I walked up King's Parade in his company. Reflected glory covered me. While he, royally careless of the observation he excited, was quick to note the grace of the different college buildings, the effects of light and colour, to ask a hundred pertinent questions, make a hundred pertinent remarks on all which caught his eye. What a delightful mind he had, open both to poetic and humorous impressions; instinctively using the right word, moreover, and striking out the happy phrase when it suited him to lay aside his slang.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXIV

We dined in a private room on the first floor, which overlooked the street. Hartover proved a brilliant host. Once or twice, after anecdotes a trifle too highly salted for my white tie and clerical coat, he checked himself with a pretty air of penitence, expressing a mischievous hope I "wasn't shocked." Shocked I was not, being no puritan; but somewhat grieved, I must admit, his wit should take so gross a turn. Yet what wonder? The guard-room is hardly mealy-mouthed, I supposed; neither, I could imagine, was French Mademoiselle—in intimacy. To her, by the way, I observed, Hartover made so far no smallest allusion.

But he spoke of Braithwaite, asking, with an indifference too studied to carry conviction, if my friendship still continued with the father and daughter, and—"were they well?" I answered both questions briefly in the affirmative; and there, to my relief, the subject dropped.

Towards the end of dinner his high spirits, which, entertaining though he had been, struck me all along as slightly forced, deserted him, and he became silent and preoccupied. Were we approaching disclosure of the trouble which, as he asserted, brought him here hot-foot, to Cambridge and to me? How gladly would I have made the way of confession easy

Digitized by Google

for him! But I had sense to know I must be passive in the matter. Whatever confidence he gave must be given spontaneously. To question him, however circumspectly, would be to put him off by arousing his sensitive pride.

As the waiter brought in coffee and lights, Hartover rose, swung out onto the balcony, and, leaning his elbows on the high iron rail of it, stood gazing down into the street. The June twilight lingered, disputing the feeble glimmer of the street lamps. Roofs, gables, pinnacles and towers showed velvet black against the sweet translucence of an almost colourless sky. Footsteps, voices, a grind of wheels and cloppet, cloppet, of horse-hoofs over the stones; the scream of swifts in the buoyant rush of their evening flight, and the tang of a chapel bell, a single reiterated note. Some five minutes must have elapsed while these varied sounds reached me from without. Then Hartover raised his head, calling imperatively over his shoulder—

"Brownlow, Brownlow, where are you? I want you. Come here."

Evidently he had reached some crisis of purpose or of feeling. I went out into the warm evening air and stood beside him. His head was lowered, and again he gazed down into the street.

"I am sorry, I am ashamed, Brownlow," he said, an odd thickness in his speech, "but I am afraid I have come here to-day and disturbed you on false pretences. I am afraid I cannot bring myself to talk to you about this matter after all."

Digitized by Google

He paused as asking an answer.

"Very well," I replied. "I, at all events, have gained by your coming, in that I have had the joy of seeing you again. Leave the rest if you think fit. You alone can know what you wish—know what appears to you right under the circumstances. You must use your own judgment."

"Ah! there you have me," he returned sharply. "I don't know what I wish. I am uncertain what is right. I distrust my own judgment. In short I'm cornered, Brownlow, miserably, detestably cornered. To speak looks to me, at this moment, like an act of unpardonable treachery. Yet, if I don't speak, I may be rushed before many days are out, by my own mad anger, into something even worse than treachery. Do you understand?"

In a sense I did understand, by intuition born of affection and sympathy. But, unless I was greatly mistaken in my reading of him, all this was merely preliminary. If I waited, I should understand, or at least hear, the whole. And that it would be well for him I should hear the whole I had—God helping me—no shadow of doubt.

Slowly the twilight expired, while the blue of the night sky, opaque, profound, travelled stealthily, almost imperceptibly, downward from the zenith. The joyous scream of the swifts ceased, and the bell tanged irregularly, nearing its finish. As it did so, a little group of gownsmen, gathered upon the pavement immediately below, seized by an irresponsible spirit of frolic—as most young animals are prone to

Digitized by Google

be at dusk—started laughing and skylarking, their black raiment fluttering, batlike, as they skirmished across the greyness of the street.

Whether the sudden outcry jarred his already strained nerves, or whether the careless whole-hearted fun and laughter of these men, so little younger than himself, offered too mordant a contrast to his own troubled state, Hartover flung in from the balcony with an oath, hesitated for an instant, then blew out the lights and threw himself into an armchair.

"No, I'm not strong enough to hold my tongue. Wretched weakling that I am," he groaned, "I must blab. And concerning a woman too."

He extended his hand, through the semi-darkness, motioning me to a chair.

"Sit there, please," he said. "My God, when it comes to the point how I despise myself, Brownlow! It's—it's about her, about Fédore."

"Yes," I replied, as calmly as I could, for his tone moved me deeply. And the subject, too! I trembled, penetrated alike by fear and hope of what I should hear next.

"For the last month or six weeks something's been wrong—some mystery on hand I cannot fathom. Somebody who has, or imagines they have, a hold over her is pressing her for money, as far as I can make out. I believe—oh! it is an abominable suspicion, but I cannot rid my mind of it—this person visits the house when she is sure I shall be away. I have no idea who, Brownlow; but someone belong-

Digitized by Google

ing to her old life, before I married her. Each time lately that I have been with her she has insisted upon my telling her exactly when I intend to come again. Nothing will pacify her but that I must fix a date and hour. Her persistence has vexed me once or twice. We nearly quarrelled over it. She says"—he choked a little—"it is only that she may be able to put on a pretty gown, prepare a nice little dinner, and have everything smart and charming for me. But I don't believe that is her sole reason—perhaps I am just a jealous brute—but I can't. I wish to Heaven I could!"

He waited, fighting down his emotion.

"Yesterday matters came to a head. I went with"—he mentioned the names of several young men, well known, not to say notorious, in fashionable and sporting circles—"to a race meeting at ——. I meant to stop the week. But racing bores me after a little while, and the play was too high at night. Positively I couldn't afford it. So I cut my stay short, went back to town, and to Chelsea. I can't deny I have been living rather hard, and I was cross with myself—I really have kept awfully straight for the last six months, Brownlow—and a bit seedy and out of sorts."

Again he waited.

"I let myself in at the garden door, and then at the house-door—as a matter of course. I had no intention of jumping any surprise on her. I was not thinking about my suspicions or any little tiff we had had. I only wanted to get to her, Brownlow, be-

Digitized by Google

cause I knew she'd put me into good conceit with myself—tease and pet and amuse me, you know—she can be devilish amusing when she likes——"

His voice broke.

"Yes," I said quietly, "yes——"

My heart bled for him; but I must be cautious and husband my resources. The time to speak would surely come, but it was not yet.

"I found the house empty," he went on presently, recovering himself, "windows bolted and doors locked. I called her, and looked for her upstairs and down; but neither she nor the maid was at home. I was disappointed, of course; but I would not let myself be angry. I had told her I should be away till the end of the week, so she had a perfect right to go out if she wanted to. Finally I went into the drawing-room, meaning to wait there till she came in. But, somehow, I received a new impression of the house. It struck me as grubby, fusty, low-class. I wondered why I had never observed this before, or whether it was merely the effect of my disappointment at her absence. There were scraps of a torn-up letter on the carpet, for one thing, which I greatly disliked. I began to pick them up, and casually—I did not attempt to read it of course—I remarked the writing was in French. Then I thought I would smoke, to pass the time until she came back. I wanted something with which to cut off the end of my cigar, but found I had brought no penknife, so I rummaged in her little work table for a pair of scissors. I could not find any in the top

Digitized by Google

work-box part, and tried to pull out the square silk-covered drawer arrangement underneath, as I remembered often seeing her put her scissors away in it with her work. But the beastly thing was locked or jammed. Like a fool, I lost my temper over it, and dragged and poked till the catch gave and the drawer flew open. And—and, Brownlow, inside I saw a couple of white leather jewel-cases—oh! the whole thing was so incredible, such a profanation—it made me sick—stamped with a monogram and coronet. I recognised them at once. They belonged to my mother—own mother I mean——"

His tone grew fierce.

"Not Her Magnificence. Her hands have never touched, and touching defiled them, I am thankful to think.—These jewels would come to me, in the ordinary course of events, with certain other possessions of my mother's, at my majority. Meanwhile they have always been kept in the strong-room at Hover. And, Brownlow—this is the point of the whole hateful business—they were among the valuables that scoundrel, Marsigli—you remember him, my stepmother's beloved Italian butler?—made off with last year, and which by some to my mind incomprehensible stupidity on the part of the police—I have often talked it over with Fédore—have never yet been traced."

"Were the contents of the cases intact?" I asked.

He hesitated.

"No—," he said at last, unwillingly, almost I thought despairingly—"and that makes it all the

Digitized by Google

more intolerable. The cases were empty; and from the position in which I found them it seemed to me they had been thrown into the drawer just anyhow, by a person in a frantic hurry—too great a hurry to make sure the drawer was actually locked. For, if it had been properly locked, it would not have given way so easily when I tried to force it. These signs of haste increased my fears, Brownlow. For think," he cried with sudden passion, "only think what it all points to, what it may all mean! How could these precious things of my mother's have found their way into the drawer of Fédore's work table—unless? The conjunction of ideas would be positively grotesque if—if it were not so damnable.—Does not it occur to you what horrible possibilities are opened out?"

It did. I gauged those possibilities far more clearly than he, indeed, remembering my conversation with Warcop in the stables at Hover but a few weeks back. For was not Warcop's theory in process of being proven up to the hilt? But how could I speak of either theory or proof to Hartover, distracted and tortured as he was? To do so would be incomparably cruel. No, I must play a waiting game still. The truth—or, to be exact, that which I firmly and increasingly believed to be the truth—must reach him by degrees, lest he should be driven into recklessness or violence. I would temporise, try to find excuses even, so as to retard rather than hasten the shock of that most ugly disclosure.

"All which you tell me is very strange and per-

Digitized by Google

plexing," I said. "But do not let us be hurried into rash and possibly unjust conclusions. There may be some explanation which will put a very different complexion upon affairs. Have you asked for any?"

"No," he said. "It was too soon to think of that. I could not meet her, could not trust myself to see or speak to her then. My one impulse was to get away, to get out of the house in which, as it seemed to me, I had been so shamelessly betrayed and tricked. I was half mad with rage and grief. For—ah! don't you understand, Brownlow?—I do love her. Not as I loved Nellie Braithwaite. That was unique—a love more of the soul than the senses. Pure and clean as a wind of morning, blowing straight out of Paradise. The love of my youth, of —in a way—my virginity; such as can never come twice in my or any man's life."

He stopped, a sob in his throat. But not for long. The floodgates were open—all the proud, wayward, undisciplined, sensitive nature in revolt.

"My love for Fédore is different—no morning wind from Eden about that. How should there be? In the interval I had very effectually parted company with all claims to the angelic state. But think —she nursed me, dragged me back from the very mouth of hell; protected me from those who sought to ruin me; gave herself to me; made a home for me, too, of a sort—oh! that poor, poor, hateful little Chelsea house!—coaxed me, flirted with me, kept me from gambling and from drink. How could I

Digitized by Google

do otherwise than marry her, and love her, out of the merest decency of ordinary gratitude? I owe her so much—— And now——"

Here Hartover gave way completely. I felt rather than saw him—there was no light in the room save that thrown upward from the lamps in the street—fling himself sideways in the chair, crushing his face down upon the arm of it in a paroxysm of weeping.

Only a woman should look on a man's tears, since the motherhood resident in every woman—whether potential or as an accomplished act—has power to staunch those tears without humiliation and offence. To his fellow-man the sight is disabling; painful or unseemly according to individual quality, but, in either case, excluding all possibility of approach.

I rose, went over to the window, and waited there. The boy should have his cry out, unhindered by my neighbourhood, since I knew he was beyond my clumsy male capacity of consolation. Later, when he came to himself, he would understand I had withdrawn not through callousness, but through reverence. Meanwhile, what a position and what a prospect! My heart sank. How, in Heaven's name, could he be drawn up out of this pit he had digged for himself? And he loved Nellie still. And, whatever his faults, whatever his weaknesses—vices even—his beauty and charm remained, beguiling, compelling, as ever. What woman could resist him? The thought gave me a pang. I put it from me sternly. Self, and again self—would self never die?

Digitized by Google

Even in this hour of my dear boy's agony, as he lay sobbing his hot young heart out within half a dozen paces of me, must I think of myself and of my private sorrow?

I looked up into the vast serenity of the star-gemmed sky above the black irregular outline of the buildings opposite, and renewed my vow to Nellie—remembering no greater love hath any man than this, that he lay down his life—life of the body, or far dearer life of emotions, the affections—for his friend.

And presently, as I still mused, I became aware of a movement in the room and of Hartover close beside me, his right arm cast about my neck.

"Dear old man, dear old man," he said hoarsely, yet very gently, "forgive me. I have felt for these past twenty-four hours as though the last foothold had gone, the last foothold between me and perdition. But it isn't so—you are left. Stay by me, Brownlow. See me through. Before God, I want to do right. Your worthless pupil wants for once to be a credit to you. But I cannot stand alone. I am afraid of myself. I distrust my own nature. If I go to her—to Fédore—with those empty jewel boxes of my mother's in my hand and she lies to me, I shall want to kill her. And if she tells me what I can't but believe is the truth, I shall want to blow my own brains out. For she has been very much to me. She is my wife—and what can the future hold for either of us but estrangement, misery and disgrace?"

Digitized by Google

He waited, steadied his voice, and then—

"I know it is no small thing I ask of you; but will you come back to town with me to-morrow? And will you see her first, and so give me time to get myself in hand and decide what is to be done, before she and I meet? Will you stand between me and the devils of revenge and despair who tempt me? Will you do this because—barring you, Brownlow—I have nothing, no one, left?"

Needless to set down here what I answered. He should have his way. How, in God's name, could I refuse him?

Then, as on that first night of my arrival at Hover long ago, I got him away to bed. Sat by him till he slept—at first restlessly, feverishly, murmuring to himself; and once—it cut me to the quick—calling Fédore by name, as one who calls for help in limitless distress.

The brief summer night was over and the dawn breaking before I felt free to leave him, seek my room, and take some much-needed rest.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXV

How many in every age have craved to read the future, to uncover the secrets of the coming years; and to that end have pinned a foolish faith upon the words of fortune-tellers, sooth-sayers and such like blind leaders of the blind. For my part, owing more to a sluggish quality in my blood, probably, than to any special wisdom or strength of mind, I have always felt thankful—since I became capable of reasoned thought—the future was a sealed book to me, or rather a book of which it is ordained I shall turn but one page at a time. To skip, to look on, to take a glance at the end, would be, in my case anyhow, to paralyse will and action by excess of hope or dread. No; depend on it, that is a merciful dispensation which condemns us to make haste slowly in deciphering the story of our lives, learning here a little and there a little, precept upon precept and line upon line. Unquestionably had second-sight been given me as to much which lay ahead, on the glorious June mid-day when I started with Hartover up to town, I should have been utterly unnerved by the prospect of the stern doings I was to witness; and so have proved but a pitiable broken reed on which for him to lean.

I rose early, though still tired; and, somewhat refreshed by a cold bath, dressed and made inquiries

Digitized by Google

regarding Hartover. Finding he still slept, I left a message for him and went out.

I have observed that, in fatigue, the mind is peculiarly responsive to outside influences. It was so with me, as I walked along the familiar streets in the radiant morning sunlight. Never had the inherent poetry of Cambridge, its dignity and repose, appealed to me more forcibly. My filial affection went out to this place which had sheltered my youth and inexperience, nourished my intellect, given me the means of livelihood, given me, also, many friends—went out to its traditions, to its continuity of high endeavour through centuries of scholarship, of religious and of scientific thought. What a roll of honour, what a galaxy of famous and venerable names, it could show!

But I had no time to linger, to-day of all days, over meditations such as these. Not past splendours but very present anxieties claimed me. I hastened my steps, and passed in under the fine Tudor gateway of my own college just as the men—"a numerous throng arrayed in white"—poured out from chapel, into the sunshine and shadow, the green and grey of the big quadrangle.

My object was to obtain speech of the Master; and I was fortunate enough to catch him as he was entering the Lodge. I begged for ten minutes' talk with him while he ate his breakfast—a request he granted readily, being curious, as I fancied, to learn my errand and, since I had not kept my chapel, whence I came.

Digitized by Google

I satisfied him on both points, telling him as much as I deemed expedient about Hartover's unexpected descent upon me—to all of which he listened with genuine interest and concern.

"And now, sir," I said, in conclusion, "the question arises as to whether I can be spared from my college duties until this painful business is placed upon, what at all events approaches, a reasonable and workable footing?"

"Which signifies, being interpreted—am I prepared to sanction your doing that which you fully intend to do whether I sanction it or not? Eh, Brownlow?"

I acquiesced smiling, relieved to find him in so sympathetic a humour.

"Very well, then; so be it," he said. "Having put your hand to this particular plough—at no small personal cost to yourself, quixotic fellow that you are—you are resolved not to look back; and I am the last man to invite you to do so. On the contrary, go on with your ploughing and drive a straight furrow. Only provide, to the best of your ability, against friction and disappointment here. Your absence will necessarily create some. Both I and others shall miss you. You must pay—or rather we, I suppose, must pay—the price of your popularity."

And he looked at me very kindly, while I reddened at the implied praise.

"See the amount of friction be as small as possible," he went on. "And now, as to this erratic

Digitized by Google

young nobleman, Lord Hartover—whose affairs appear to furnish such a promising battlefield to the powers of good and evil—I shall make no attempt to see him, although it would interest me to do so. Knowing all that I do know about him and his family, I should find it almost impossible to ignore personal matters, and equally impossible, in the present crisis, to speak of them without a breach of good taste. I have hardly seen him since the death of his mother, the first lady Longmoor, when he was a child.—Ah! there was a rare specimen of womanhood, Brownlow, if you like! I stayed at Hover frequently during her all too brief reign. This young man may esteem himself fortunate if he inherits even a tithe of her charm of person and of nature."

After which pleasantly encouraging words I rose to depart. While, as the Master held out his hand to me—

"Remember I am content to pull the strings unseen," he added. "Consult me by letter if you need my advice. Count on me in respect of pounds, shillings, and pence, too, if your own funds do not cover the expenditure in which you may find yourself involved. We must prepare for contingencies—Detective Inspector Lavender to wit. With his participation, by the way, I should strongly advise you not to acquaint Lord Hartover unless absolutely compelled. Convict the woman, but, if possible, do so privately. Avoid all appearance of running her down; since, for sentimental if no deeper reasons,

Digitized by Google

it might lead to a breach between yourself and the young man which would be lamentable in the extreme."

This last bit of advice was sound, but far from easy to follow. The more I thought it over—as we posted those fifty odd miles, by Audley End, Bishop Stortford, Broxbourne and Tottenham, from Cambridge up to town—the more clearly I saw how greatly the fact of my having already called in the help of a detective increased the difficulty of my seeing Mademoiselle Fédore and demanding the explanation Hartover desired. Could I do so without taking Inspector Lavender into my confidence regarding Hartover's discovery? And could I take Lavender into my confidence without curtailing my own freedom of action and inviting a public exposure of Fédore which must be abhorrent to the dear boy? Here, indeed, was a problem hard of solution! Still it appeared an integral part of the whole, and to the whole I had pledged myself. I must be guided, therefore, by circumstance, dealing with each new phase of this very complicated affair as it presented itself; keeping, meantime, as cool a head and quiet a mind as might be. To meet danger half-way may be less an act of prudence than a waste of energy. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof—and the good thereof likewise, if a man has faith to believe so.

We were to dine on the way, and to reach the great house in Grosvenor Square between nine and ten o'clock. There, as I learned from Hartover,

Digitized by Google

he still—when he pleased—occupied a set of rooms upon the ground floor, with a private entrance from the side street, which I well remembered.

"It isn't that I have any particular love for being under the family roof," he told me. "But I saw the Rusher wanted to oust me and collar those rooms for himself, and I did not choose to have it. So I stuck to them. Her Magnificence couldn't give me notice to quit without appealing to my father, and she really had not the face for that. There are limits to even her audacity! Now she and I are like buckets in a well. When she arrives, I depart and take up my abode elsewhere. Quarrelled with her? Good Lord, no. She is the most impossible person to quarrel with on the face of the earth. As slippery as an eel—I beg your pardon, a mermaid, shall we say? It does sound more polite. But hold her you can't. She slithers through your fingers, in that fascinating, mocking, laughing way of hers—you know it?"

Did I not?–

"And leaves you, feeling like every sort of fool, cursing, most consumedly, both her and yourself."

He laughed not quite pleasantly.

"But, the devil helping me, Brownlow, I'll be even with her some day yet. When my father dies —always supposing I survive him, which quite conceivably I shall not—Her Magnificence and I will square accounts. It'll be a little scene worth witnessing. I hope, dear old man, you may be present!"

Digitized by Google

A wish I could not altogether find it in my heart to echo. But, as he fell silent, staring out over the sun-bathed country, through the cloud of dust raised by wheels and horse-hoofs—subtle lines of care and of bitterness deforming the youthfulness of his beautiful face—I was spared the necessity of answering, for which I was glad.

All day—though towards me he had shown himself uniformly courteous and gentle, loving even—the boy's spirits had fluctuated, his moods being many and diverse. At one time he was full of anecdote and racy talk, at another steeped in gloom or irritably explosive, swearing in most approved fine-gentleman fashion at any and everything not exactly to his taste. In short, while he avoided any mention of the object of our journey and our conversation of last night, I could not but see these were persistently uppermost in his thought, keeping his nerves cruelly on edge. What wonder, when all his future hung in the balance! How far did he actually love Fédore—how far actually want her proved innocent? I could not tell. His attitude baffled me. Yet it seemed incredible the society of such a woman should continue to satisfy him—that differences of age, station, nationality, education, should not be prolific, at times at all events, of repulsion and something akin to disgust. Quite independent of that matter of the jewels and the ugly suspicions raised by it, must he not have begun by now to measure the enormity of his mistake in marrying her? I, at once, hoped and feared he had. While, as the miles of road fled

Digitized by Google

away behind us beneath the horses' trotting feet, the sadness of his position grew upon me, until I had much ado to keep my feelings to myself.

Once arrived, Hartover slipped his arm through mine, and we entered the stately house together, while he said, a little huskily:

"Brownlow, it is good to have you—very good of you to come. Don't imagine I do not appreciate what you are doing for me because to-day I have not said much about it. Oh! how I wish you could always be with me! Having given Cambridge the slip, you'll stay now, won't you, as long as you possibly can?"

Deeply touched by his affection, I was about to assure him I would indeed remain while I was of any real service and comfort to him, when William —grown stout, sleek, but, as I thought, a good deal more trustworthy-looking—came forward with a packet on a salver.

"What's that?" Hartover inquired sharply. Put it down. I cannot be bothered with it now."

"I am sorry, my lord," the man answered, with evident unwillingness, "but I am bound to bring it to your notice. His lordship sent by express this morning from Bath. The messenger is waiting for your acknowledgment."

Hartover's hand grew heavy on my arm.

"Very well," he said. "I will send my orders presently."

And he led me into a fine room, opening off the

Digitized by Google

corridor on the left, where supper had been laid for us.

"As I supposed," he went on, after glancing at the contents of the packet. "A summons from my father to attend his deathbed—in which last, by the way, I don't for an instant believe. Brownlow, what am I to do?"

"What but obey?"

"To be told, when I get there, either that he has been miraculously restored to health, or that he has changed his mind; in either case that he no longer wishes to see me, and so—practically—have the door slammed in my face? No, I tell you these repeated visits to Bath become a farce, and an impertinent one at that. My father persistently sends for me and as persistently refuses to receive me when I come. Last time I swore, if he sent any more, he would send in vain. Why should I let him make me a laughing-stock, and treat me with less consideration than one of his own valets? Why cannot he be reasonably civil to me? It is intolerable, not to be borne. But his mind—such mind as he ever possessed, no great thing from the first as far as I can discover—has been poisoned against me for years by the gang of hypocrites and toadies which surrounds him. Only just now"—Hartover spread out his hands passionately, his face flushed, his eyes filling with tears—"think, Brownlow, think how can I leave London? How can I endure the suspense of absence when—when——"

For a moment I feared he would give way to one

Digitized by Google

of those fits of ungovernable anger before which I had trembled at Hover of old. But, to my great relief, he mastered himself, after a while growing gentle and composed.

"You are right, dear old man, as usual," he said at last. "I will go. Then at least my conscience as a model son will be clear, whatever his lordship's as a tender father may, or may not, be."

And so it was settled he should start at cock-crow, leaving me to deal with the unlovely business of Mademoiselle Fédore—an arrangement I found far from unwelcome, since it secured me greater freedom of action than I could have hoped for otherwise.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXVI

LEFT to myself, next morning, I sought out Detective Inspector Lavender—a large, fair, pink-faced, grey-eyed man, with a soothing voice and fatherly smile, as unlike the human sleuth-hound of melodrama and fiction as could well be. Before making my fateful call upon Fédore it would be very desirable, I felt, to learn whether he had any fresh news for me and shape my course accordingly.

He greeted me with—

"Well, sir, you are the gentleman of all others I was wishing to see. My fellow officers are a bit jealous sometimes of what they are pleased to call Lavender's luck—and my luck is uncommonly to the fore, I must say, this morning."

I inquired why.

"Because this little man-hunting job of yours and mine seems on the tip of success. A word from you may settle it."

I inquired how.

"Well, sir, could you undertake to identify this Mr. Marsigli if you saw him?"

I answered that I believed I undoubtedly could.

"Then the affair becomes very simple. Lavender's luck, sir, Lavender's luck. So, if you have an hour or two to spare, I will ask you to go with me to a certain humble residence, from the windows of

Digitized by Google

which two of my men are keeping watch on a certain door, in a certain garden-wall, not very many miles from here."

"In Chelsea?" I said—the question surprised out of me by his words, before I had time to consider the wisdom of asking it.

"Just so, sir—in Chelsea—you've hit the right nail on the head." And, for all his soothing voice and fatherly smile, the detective's grey eyes grew uncommonly keen and bright.

"Pray may I ask, have you any particular interest in a door in a garden-wall giving access to a queerly stowed-away little house in a Chelsea side street?"

Clearly there was nothing for it but to put him in full possession of the facts; at the same time urging him to bear in mind the relation in which the inhabitant of that same queerly stowed-away dwelling stood, or was supposed to stand, to Lord Hartover.

He considered, for some minutes in silence, rubbing his hand slowly over his chin. Then—

"This promises to be a more delicate piece of work than I expected. Either we must act together, fair and square and above-board, you understand, sir, without reserve on either side; or you must leave it all to me; or I must retire from the business, making the best case I can for myself to the authorities, and leave it all to you. It is a ticklish enough job either way. Now which shall it be, sir? The decision rests with you, since you are, in a sense, my employer; but I must ask you to make it at once, before I give you any further information. And

Digitized by Google

please remember, sir, that while I am ready to do all in my power to meet your wishes and spare the young nobleman's feelings, my first duty and first object is to bring the guilty party, or parties, to justice, whatsoever and whosoever they may be."

It was my turn now to consider, since I could not but admit the soundness of his position. And I found myself, I own, in a dilemma. To leave all to Lavender appeared to me at once cowardly and somewhat lacking in good faith towards the dear boy; while to take the entire responsibility upon myself would be, I feared, both presumptuous and foolhardy.

"No, we must work together, Inspector," I said, finally. "You may depend upon my loyalty; and I may, I am sure, depend upon your discretion, so long as the ends of justice are in no wise imperilled."

"Well said, sir," he replied. "I believe you will have no reason to regret your decision."

And we proceeded to talk matters over thoroughly, he asking me again for a careful description of Marsigli.—Tall, of good figure and distinguished appearance, as I told him, a genuine North Italian type, crisp black hair, clear olive skin, and regular features; a serious and courtly manner, moreover.

Lavender consulted some notes.

"Yes, sir," he said, "that tallies with the account of an individual my men have had under observation for the best part of a fortnight. Twice he has called at the house I spoke of. Our gentleman has added a neatly-grown moustache and beard to his other

Digitized by Google

attractions, recently, as I fancy; but it will hardly prevent your recognising him—that is if Lavender's luck holds, sir, and I can procure you a good look at him."

Regarding my mission to Fédore—we agreed, since Hartover could not be back in town under a couple of days at soonest—it might very well stand over until to-morrow, and that meanwhile I should place my time entirely at my companion's disposal.

"If we have not laid hands on this fellow before midnight, you shall be free to follow your own wishes as to visiting the lady," he promised me; and therewith, calling a coach, bore me off southwestward to Chelsea.

The glorious summer weather of the past three or four days was about to terminate in the proverbial English thunder-storm. I seldom remember a more oppressive atmosphere. London still offers a not altogether satisfactory example of applied sanitary science, but, at the date in question, once you left the fashionable districts and main thoroughfares, was frankly malodorous, not to say filthy. Half-way along King's Road Lavender paid off the coach, and conducted me, on foot, by festering, foul smelling by-ways, to the back of a row of mean two-storied houses. Gaining access to one of them—which from its dilapidated condition I judged to be empty—through a yard strewn with all manner of unsightly rubbish, a dead cat included, we passed by a narrow passage and stairway to a front room on the first floor. Here two detectives awaited our coming, and

Digitized by Google

here, seated on a remarkably comfortless Windsor chair, by the defaced and broken window I passed what appeared a small eternity, looking out into the ill-paved street, where groups of squalid, half-naked children played and fought, and hawkers plied a noisy, unremunerative trade.

Opposite was a long stretch of much-defiled drab brick wall, pierced by a green-painted door, and furnished with a fringe of broken bottle glass along the top, above which showed the upper branches of a plane tree and the roof and chimney-pots of an otherwise invisible dwelling. The whole presented a sordid and disheartening picture in the close heavy heat, beneath a sullen grey-blue sky across which masses of heavy cloud stalked upright in the face of a fitful and gusty wind.

And to think this was the place to which Hartover—heir to immense wealth and princely possessions, heir to royal Hover affronting the grandeur of those wind-swept Yorkshire fells—must needs descend to seek comfort, companionship, and some ordinary human kindness of care and woman's love! The irony, the cynicism, of it struck through me with indignation and disgust.

I am under the impression Lavender did his best to lighten the tedium of my vigil by talking, humorously and well, of matters pertaining to his profession. That he discoursed to me of the differences between English and Continental methods of criminal procedure—the former of which he held notably superior in dignity and in fair-play—while his under-

Digitized by Google

lings smoked their pipes in modest silence. But I am afraid I accorded his well-meant efforts for my entertainment scanty attention; nor even, when the storm broke, did I pay much heed to the long-drawn cannonade, the boom and crash of warning elements.

For, throughout that lengthy waiting, the thought of Hartover and of his future had grown to be a veritable obsession, dwarfing all else in my mind. Again his pathetic outcry over the "poor, poor, hateful little Chelsea house"—the roof and chimney-pots of which I could see there opposite, above the fringe of broken bottle glass topping the wall—rang in my ears. And, as it did so, Self, by God's grace, at last, was mastered. Yes, it came to this—to all else would I give the go-by, readily, gladly—to my pleasant studious life at Cambridge and its prospect of solid emoluments, of personal distinction and scholarly renown, to my last lingering hope—for even yet a faint, sweet, foolish hope did linger—of some day making Nellie Braithwaite nearer, and ah! how vastly, exquisitely dearer than a mere friend—if thus I might be permitted to redeem Hartover, to save him from the consequences of his own wayward, though not ignoble, nature, and from the consequences of others' wholly ignoble conspiracies and sins. I was ready to make my sacrifice without hesitation or return; only, in my weakness, I prayed for some assurance it was accepted, prayed for a sign.

Was the sign given? It seemed so. I sprang to my feet, calling Lavender hurriedly by name.

It was late afternoon now. The worst of the

Digitized by Google

storm over, though big plashy drops still fell, while steam rose off the sun-baked paving-stones. Through this veil of moisture a man walked rapidly to the door in the wall and knocked. Waiting for his knock to be answered, he turned, took off his hat, shook it sharply to dislodge the wet, and, so doing, glanced up at the still lowering sky. I saw his face distinctly.

Lavender stood at my elbow.

"Well, sir, well, sir?" he said, an odd eagerness and vibration in his voice.

"Yes," I declared. "Marsigli, Lord Longmoor's former butler, without doubt."

"You would be prepared to swear to him in a court of law, if required?"

"Absolutely prepared," I said.

Here the door was opened cautiously from the garden. Marsigli thrust past the servant, and disappeared within.

Now or never! Lavender and his underlings darted down the crazy stairs and across the road. I followed at my best pace, very vital excitement gripping me, in time to see him knock, await the opening of the door, and—then a rush. The three were inside so quickly that, before I could join them, the servant—a middle-aged, hard-featured, somewhat shrewish-looking Frenchwoman—was safe in the custody of the younger detective, Lavender and the other pushing on for the house.

"If she attempts to scream, throttle her," Lavender said, in a sufficiently loud aside to have a whole-

Digitized by Google

somely restraining effect upon the captive. "Now, sir," to me, "as little noise as possible in getting upstairs, please."

And he glanced meaningly, though not unkindly, at my lame leg.

I crept after them as quietly as I could, and had reason; for on reaching the landing we heard voices, a man's and a woman's, high in altercation.

The door of the front drawing-room, I should explain, stood open, the front room communicating with the back by folding doors. These were closed, and within them the quarrel took place; but so loudly that, as we advanced, I could distinguish nearly every word.

"It is impossible. I tell you he is still away."

"No one else can have taken them. No one else has a key to this sweet little nest—and so the game is up, my child, by now the fraud discovered. You are trapped—trapped!"

"Beast," the woman cried, in a tone of concentrated fury and contempt. "Go. Do you hear? I tell you to go, or I send Marie for the police."

"Pish, you little fool, you know you dare not. What money have you?"

"Money, indeed! I have none, and if I had I would rather fling it in the gutter than you should have it. Go—go—are you deaf?"

"Hand over the rest of the jewels then; or I call in the police myself, and tell them—you know what."

"It is a lie—a lie. I am his wife."

"Idiot—you are my wife, not his."

Digitized by Google

"Die then, since you prefer it," he said. "Thief, liar—adulteress."

While, with a terrible cry, Fédore leapt off the couch.

"A knife!" she screamed. "Save me. He has a knife."

And, as she ran towards us, I saw something narrow and bright flash downwards between her shoulders, and—a red spout of blood. Her knees gave under her. She lurched, flung up her arms, kneeling for an instant bolt upright, a world of agony and despair in her splendid eyes, and then, before either of us could reach her, fell back.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXVII

Of the half-hour which followed I can give no coherent account. As I try to recall it, after the lapse of many years, details start into vivid relief, but without sequence or any clear relation of cause and effect.

I have an impression of helping Lavender to raise Fédore from the ground, and of his muttering—"A foul blow, before God a foul blow," as we laid her, quivering but apparently unconscious, upon the couch. An impression of sultry, copper-coloured sunshine suddenly and harshly lighting up the disordered room, the grim assembly of men, and the woman's pale recumbent figure, as with a glare of widespread conflagration. I have an impression of Marsigli, too, and that a very strange one, coolly holding out his hands—the right hand horribly splashed and stained—while Lavender clapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists. The fury of primitive passion seemed assuaged in him by his hideous act of vengeance, and he had become impassive, courtly even in manner, as I remembered him when waiting on Her Magnificence at table or ushering in her guests. He had given himself up, as I heard later, without any struggle or attempt at escape. But above all I have an impression, nauseating and to me indescribably dreadful, which—though I trust I am not unduly

Digitized by Google

squeamish—I shall, I believe, carry with me to the day of my death, an impression of the sight, the sense, the smell of fresh shed blood. Upon that I will not dwell further, since, however deeply affecting to myself, it can serve no useful purpose.

Finally—summoned, I suppose, by the younger of Lavender's underlings, who had reappeared after locking the servant, Marie, in some room below—a surgeon arrived. Then I slipped away downstairs and out into the comparatively cool untainted atmosphere of the shabby little garden. If I was wanted, they must call me. Not voluntarily could I witness a professional examination of what, less than an hour ago, had been a strong and very beautiful if very sinful woman, and was now but a helpless corpse.

All my thought had softened towards Fédore. Her evildoings—evil even in respect of her accomplice—were manifest. For, let us be just, Marsigli's crime was not without provocation. But she had played for great stakes and had lost. The pathos of irremediable failure was upon her. And I was awe-stricken by the swiftness of her punishment, the relentless and appalling haste with which she had been thrust out of life. Into what uncharted regions of being had her astute, ambitious, and voluptuous spirit now passed? Regardless of the prohibitions of my Church, I prayed—and how earnestly!—her sins might be forgiven; and that through the Eternal Mercy—so far broader, deeper, more abiding, as I confidently believe, than any man-made definition

Digitized by Google

of it—she might even yet find a place for repentance and peace at the last.

Under the plane-tree I found a rickety garden seat, on which, being now very tired, I was glad enough to rest.

How long I remained there in solitude—hearing the distant roar of London and a confused movement and noise of voices from the street, in which I judged a crowd had now gathered—I know not. But, finally, I beheld the stalwart form of Lavender, his hands clasped behind him and his head bent as in deep thought, coming up the wet garden path between the straggling row of little fruit-trees. His aspect struck me as depressed.

"Well, sir," he said, when he reached me. "I think we have done all we can for to-night. I have disposed of Mr. Marsigli, and I and my men have been pretty thoroughly through the house. Some of what I take to be the stolen jewels are there, and a certain amount of plate; but no letters or papers that I can discover."

He took out his handkerchief and wiped his face.

"This is strictly between ourselves, sir," he went on, "you understand of course?"

I assured him I did.

"Then I think I may say that in my opinion you can make your mind easy as to the existence of a previous marriage. You remember the conversation we overheard? Her answer, you may have observed, was not a denial of the fact but of the existence of proof—a very different story. However, if

Digitized by Google

we fail to find proofs nearer home it will be simple to take a run over to Paris. We shall have no difficulty with the prisoner. It is in his interest to give all the information he can, and he is sharp enough to know that. A rum customer, though, as I have ever had to deal with—one minute a mad savage and the next close on a fine gentleman. Trying cattle these foreigners, always springing some trick on you! He'll have to swing for her, I expect—still she must have led him a pretty lively dance. Something to be said on both sides, sir, as in my experience there usually is."

Much of the above was welcome hearing; yet the detective's aspect remained depressed. Again he wiped his face.

"And now I dare say you'll not be sorry to be moving, sir," he remarked.

Then as I rose, stiff and weary, and walked beside him along the garden path, the real source of his trouble was disclosed.

"I feel I am bound to apologise, sir, for letting you in for so much unpleasantness. I blame myself; I was over-confident, and have got a well-deserved slap to my professional pride as the result."

"How so?" I asked him.

"Why, I delayed too long before opening those double doors in my eagerness to secure all the evidence I could—a mistake which might be excusable in a youngster, but not in one of my standing. The very secret of our business is to know the moment for action to a tick. I let them both get too worked

Digitized by Google

up. And, worked up as they were, he being Italian, I ought to have foreseen the likelihood of that knife. No, sir, look at it what way I will, I am bound to blame myself. It is a discredit, in my opinion, and a grave one, for a man in my position to have a murder—and in broad daylight too—committed within three yards of his nose. The less said the better, I'm afraid, for some time to come, sir, about Lavender's luck."

I consoled the mortified and over-conscientious hunter of criminals and crime to the best of my ability; and then, thankfully bidding farewell to that blood-stained and tragic little house, pushed my way, with Lavender's help, through the gaping and curious crowd in the street, and, bestowing myself in the coach one of his men had called for me, rumbled and jolted back to Grosvenor Square through the hot, thundery dusk.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AND now I had before me the task of telling the dear boy what must modify, and might completely alter, the course and complexion of his life. No light duty this, or small responsibility. It was, I felt, a great crisis, a great turning-point. In what spirit would he meet it, and how should I acquit myself? I was glad to have a little leisure in which to shake off the terrible impressions of yesterday and get my mind into a more normal attitude before delivering my news.

No account of what had happened could be in the papers under a couple of days, so I had every reason to suppose Hartover would not receive any hint of it before we met. I arranged with Lavender, moreover, that, as his connection with Fédore had no direct bearing on the case, Hartover's name was to be carefully kept out of such reports as appeared. This done, I tried to occupy myself with the books, pictures, and other treasures the house contained; assiduously waited on by William, meanwhile, who, from his readiness to linger and to talk, suspected more, as I judged, than he dared ask or than I very certainly intended to tell him.

But my leisure suffered interruption sooner than I anticipated, and in a manner calculated to set William's curiosity more than ever on edge.

Digitized by Google

On the second day—it was a Sunday—Lavender called about ten o'clock, bringing me news of which more hereafter; suffice it that a great burden was lifted off my mind. Having been prevented attending morning service by the detective's visit, I went to church in the evening; but returned little the better, spiritually, I fear, for an hour's sermon in which the preacher—a portly, well-nourished personage just then very popular in the fashionable world—dilated with much unction upon the terrors of hell, and the extreme difficulty of avoiding them, the impossibility of so doing, in fact, for ninety-nine hundredths of even "professing Christians"—so called—let alone the not inconsiderable remainder of the human race. What a gospel to set forth! What a Moloch to offer as supreme object of adoration! Yet this congregation, so representative of rank and wealth, listened quite complacently, without the smallest evidence of criticism or of revolt. Had they no heart to feel with? No brains with which to think? I walked homeward disturbed and sad.

Before the portico of Lord Longmoor's house stood a travelling carriage, off which the men-servants were loading down a mighty array of boxes and trunks. And it was Lady Longmoor herself, surely—I could not mistake the buoyant step, the gay poise of the head, as of one that should say, "Look, good people all, look! I like it, I am well worth it"—who swept up the steps and into the lighted hall! Why this sudden descent of Her Magnificence, and whence?

Digitized by Google

I made my way round to the side-door and let myself in, unperceived as I hoped.

But in the corridor William met me with a somewhat distracted countenance.

"My lord is asking for you, sir," he said. "He arrived back about half an hour ago. I persuaded him to dine at once. His lordship seems quite upset, sir—not at all well. But he was very urgent to see you directly, whenever you came in."

I own my pulse quickened as I went along the corridor and into the dining-room, where I found Hartover at table. He turned round, but without rising, and held out both hands to me.

"Oh! there you are, thank goodness," he said. "I have been haunted by a childish fear you would have vanished—been spirited back to Cambridge."

I forced a laugh and inquired after Lord Longmoor.

"It is genuine this time. My father is really ill—so ill that I felt obliged to take the disagreeable things he said to me in good part. Oh! you were right to make me go to him, Brownlow. And I must go again. It is scandalous the way he is left to the mercy of doctors, and parsons, and servants—such a crew, upon my word. My stepmother away somewhere—of course amusing herself—I suppose up in the North with—oh! we'll name no names. Safer not"—he added with a sneer.

I enlightened him as to her ladyship's present whereabouts.

"So much the better," he returned. "Only she

Digitized by Google

will be disappointed if she imagines I intend to clear out. She must put up with my neighbourhood, and hear what I have to say, too, whether she likes it or not. By the way, though, Brownlow, have you dined?"

I felt incapable of eating a mouthful of food just then, so lied, Heaven forgive me, telling him I had; and, drawing up a chair, sat down beside the table at right angles to him.

"Yes, I must certainly go to my father again," Hartover repeated. "Disagreeable as he invariably manages to be to me, I believe he would have been glad if I had stayed on now. But I couldn't—I couldn't. The suspense was too great. Have you seen her, Brownlow?"

"Yes," I said. This was no time for elaborate explanations or fine phrases. The simple truth simply told would be best. "And your suspicions were not unfounded."

The boy pushed away his plate, set his elbow on the table, rested his cheek in his hand, turning his face towards me. It had gone thin and very white; but he was perfectly composed, bracing himself to bear what might be coming with the pride of his high-breeding.

"Very well. Go on," he said.

"She was Marsigli's accomplice. She instigated the theft because she wanted him removed and silenced. He stood between her and the fulfilment of her ambition—of her design to marry you."

"Go on," said Hartover, as I paused.

Digitized by Google

"But we can afford to judge her duplicity less harshly, because she has paid the extreme penalty of it—the heaviest penalty which can be exacted."

"What?"

Hartover's lips formed the words, although no sound issued from them.

"She and Marsigli had a violent altercation, with accusations and abuse on both sides. In a fit of ungovernable fury he stabbed her."

Again the boy's lips formed a soundless question, while from white his face went grey. Sweat broke out on his forehead; but he still remained composed, still looked at me steadily.

"Yes," I told him. "Fédore is dead."

Then his eyes closed, and I myself turned queerly cold and faint. He looked so young, so almost fragile, that it seemed an intolerable cruelty thus to deal him blow on blow. I could have cried aloud to him to forgive me; yet to hesitate, still more to plead for myself, would be a greater cruelty still.

"You are quite sure of—of your facts, Brownlow?" he said, at last.

"Quite sure," I answered. "The police had traced Marsigli to the house on a former occasion. They were watching for his coming, and called on me to identify him. I was present. I saw what took place."

Here William came in bringing another course. Hartover motioned him peremptorily to the door—through which, with a backward look of astonish-

Digitized by Google

ment, inquiry, alarm, the poor fellow, tray and all, fled.

"I do not understand." Hartover spoke slowly and carefully, each word standing oddly apart. "Perhaps I am stupid—but why he—Marsigli—should——"

And there he stopped.

"It was an act of vengeance, of revenge. She had deserted him; and now, as he believed, betrayed him to the police in the hope of being finally rid of him."

"Deserted—how deserted?" Hartover demanded, with sudden arrogance.

"Fédore was his wife. He and she were married here in London three years ago. A copy of the marriage certificate, taken from the register of the church where the ceremony was performed, was shown me this morning. It is perfectly in order and establishes the legality of the marriage absolutely."

"The—then"—he asked—"am I to understand that my marriage——"

"Is void. A fraud—legally Fédore was nothing to you."

The boy's hand sank on to the table, with a jangle of glasses overset among the silver. He turned away his head.

The moment was critical. I awaited the outcome of it in rather sickening dread. Hartover's physical courage I knew to be above reproach—of the stuff which charges gaily up to the mouths of the enemy's guns, or leads a forlorn hope. But, here, moral not

Digitized by Google

physical courage was on trial. Had he sufficient moral stamina to stand the test? And, as the seconds passed, thankful conviction grew on me that he had. There would be no storm now, either of anger or of tears. Hysterics and blind rage alike are the sign of weakness, superficial, and, as often as not, a mere matter of nerves. But here we had got down to the solid rock of character, of inbred tradition and instinctive pride of race. By the greatness of the deception practised on him, of the discovery that he had been the prey and plaything of a designing woman whose care and love masked intensity of worldly greed, and of the humiliation consequent, on this, the boy's self-respect was too deeply involved. Whatever he suffered he would keep to himself.

Still, I own his next move, when it came, surprised me by what I can only call its virility of conception.

He threw back his head, got up, walked across to the fireplace and, with his hand on the bell-rope, the ghost of a smile—the bravest, most piteous smile I have ever seen—upon his lips, said:

"I'm right in thinking, am I not, Brownlow, you told me my stepmother arrived just as you came in?"

I answered in the affirmative, not a little perplexed as to what was to follow.

He rang, and when William appeared gave orders her ladyship be informed that Lord Hartover requested to see her.

"Let Lady Longmoor be told I will be in the

Digitized by Google

white drawing-room, and that I beg she will join me there with as little delay as possible."

Then to me:

"You will come too, Brownlow, please. I prefer to have a witness to our conversation."

So to the white drawing-room we went—a small but lovely room, on the walls of which hung a couple of superb Vandykes, portraits of a former Lord Hartover and his brother, Stephen Esdaile, exquisite if slightly effeminate-looking, young gallants of unhappy Charles the First's court. I had noticed these pictures, with admiration, yesterday when making my round of the house. In Stephen Esdaile I discovered, as I thought, a distinct resemblance to his descendant my ex-pupil, granting the latter long curled lovelocks and a yellow silk brocade coat.

Her Magnificence kept us waiting some ten minutes, to arrive at last with a charming effect of haste, still wearing a brown travelling dress, a white lace scarf thrown negligently over her fair head. She was all smiles, all pretty excitement.

"Dearest George—what a charming surprise!"

And she advanced, preparing to bestow on him a chastely maternal kiss. But the boy avoided it dexterously, and bent low over her hand, just not touching it with his lips instead. Her ladyship, as I judged by her rising colour, was not insensible to the slight, though she rattled on gaily enough.

"And our good Mr. Brownlow too! How really delightful! Surprise on surprise. But George——"

Her tone changed, a note of anxiety, real or as-

Digitized by Google

sumed, piercing the playfulness, not to say levity, of it.

"Is anything wrong? You look positively ghastly, my poor child—as white as a sheet. Tell me—nothing is the matter—nothing serious?"

"Oh dear, no," Hartover answered. "Nothing serious is ever the matter in our family, is it? We bask in perpetual sunshine, are clothed in scarlet with other delights, fare sumptuously every day and all the rest of it. Serious? Of course not. What could touch us?"

Lady Longmoor smiled, raising her eyebrows and throwing me a meaning glance. She believed, or pretended to believe, the boy was not sober, and wished me to know as much.

"If it amuses you to talk nonsense, do so by all means," she said. "Only I am afraid you will have to forgive my not stopping here very long to listen to it, for I am simply expiring of fatigue"—she stifled a neat little yawn—"and want to go quietly to bed."

"I am sorry," Hartover answered courteously, "if I have been inconsiderate. But I thought you might care to have some news of my father. I am just back from Bath."

"Indeed!" Lady Longmoor exclaimed. "And pray who, or what, took you to poor dead-alive innocent Bath?"

"My father sent for me, and what's more saw me. He struck me as rather badly out of sorts and lonely."

Digitized by Google

"Ah! yes," she said, turning to me with the prettiest air of distress imaginable, "it is so terribly trying, Mr. Brownlow. I cannot bear leaving my dear lord in his wretched state of health. It makes me miserable. But what is to be done? Someone must look into things from time to time, you know. It is wrong to leave dear beautiful Hover entirely to the agent, the servants, and so on. Of course, they are as faithful and devoted as possible—but still it is only wise—don't you think?—only right—I should go there occasionally. Though I hate business, I do what I can."

"I hope to relieve you of the bulk of those bothers in future," Hartover put in quietly.

"You—you charming scatter-brain? What next? No, *mon enfant,* no—they are not *de votre âge,* responsibility and business worries. Continue to play at soldiers and amuse yourself while you can."

"I am tired of playing at soldiers: so confoundedly tired of it that, once I am my own master—I come of age next month, you remember,—I mean to send in my papers. There is nothing to keep me in London now——"

"Nothing—nobody, to keep you in London now?" she interrupted teasingly.

I listened in some trepidation. She trod on dangerous ground. Had the boy sufficient reserve force, after the ordeal he had so lately been through, to keep his temper?

"No, nothing," he repeated. "I think there had better be no misunderstanding between us upon that

Digitized by Google

point—and upon some others. They need clearing up—have needed it for a long time past. That is the reason of my asking to see you to-night. In the ordinary course of events we don't, as you know, often meet. I have to seize my opportunity when I am fortunate enough to get it. Plainly, I do not believe my father can live very long——"

"And plainly," she retorted, "I do not think his life is at all likely to be lengthened, dearest George, by your troubling him with absurd plans for throwing up your commission, leaving London, and taking over the management of things in general at Hover. For years Jack Esdaile has employed himself, in the sweetest way, just out of pure friendship and kindness of heart, in looking after the Yorkshire property, and your father has been more than satisfied. But it is too ridiculous for me to argue with you about it. Things will go on in the future precisely as they have gone on in the past. Only I really must protest against your father being disturbed and annoyed directly my back is turned. We all thought you had settled down more of late, George, and had grown a little more reasonable."

"Of late? Since when, pray?" Hartover demanded.

"Oh! why since——"

Lady Longmoor looked down as though embarrassed.

"But after all, what is the use of mincing matters?" she went on. "I cannot help knowing you young men have your *affaires de cœur*—your entan-

Digitized by Google

glements, shall we say?—and that these, although of course objectionable, things one doesn't talk about, do sometimes have a steadying effect which conduces to the peace and comfort of your—the young men's, I mean—near relations."

"You are speaking of an entanglement of mine?" Hartover asked.

"Yes," she replied. "An entanglement, an infatuation, which, as Mr. Brownlow knows, I have deplored for years and done my best to combat; but which—remember the person had already left my service, has, I understand, recently been legalised."

"Who told you this?" Hartover said hoarsely.

Lady Longmoor raised her eyes and glanced at me, smiling.

"That good, faithful creature, Halidane.—Wait a moment, George. Let me finish my sentence. He had the information, as I understand, direct from Mr. Brownlow, to whom you yourself wrote announcing the event."

The boy gave me a look of sorrowful reproach, remembrance of which, even at this distance of time, blinds my eyes with tears as I write.

"You too, old man," he said very softly. "Gad, it needed but that."

And he turned on his heel and moved towards the door.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXIX

BOTH by profession and inclination I am a man of peace. But for once my sluggish blood boiled; and it would have been a nasty hour for Halidane had his smug and rosy countenance come within reach of my fists. Many annoyances I had forgiven him, many more was prepared to forgive. But that he should sow discord between Hartover and me at this particular juncture outpaced my power of forgiveness. The fellow had kept a stone in his pocket for years. Now he threw it—meanly and spitefully, by the hand of a woman, thereby making it more difficult for me to parry the blow or to retaliate. Hence I subscribed most heartily, I am afraid, to any and every evil which might befall him in this world or the next!

"Either your ladyship's memory is at fault, or your informant is guilty of a remarkably odious falsehood," I said, so grimly as to disconcert my fair hearer not a little, I thought. "I should have supposed it unnecessary to declare that I have never discussed Lord Hartover or his affairs with Mr. Halidane. Any such discussion would be repugnant to me in the highest degree. If Mr. Halidane is acquainted with the contents of any letter addressed to me by Lord Hartover, he must have acquired that knowledge by methods reflecting but scanty credit upon his sense of honour, let alone his sense of com-

Digitized by Google

mon honesty. Yet I cannot pretend to be greatly surprised. For on one occasion, at least, I have had reason to accuse him of entering my college rooms, for purposes of his own, during my absence."

And I recounted, very briefly, what I had seen and heard on the night of the fire at the Master's Lodge.

Lady Longmoor, none too sure of the success of her last move, seized upon the new topic with avidity.

"Ah! yes," she cried; "we heard about that from Dr. Marston. He was loud in praise of your wonderful courage in saving the life of his niece. According to him you performed prodigies of valour. I was so interested in meeting her—Miss Davis, no Dynevor—of course, I remember, Dynevor—quite a nice girl and—and so very much in love. Oh! yes; it was all extraordinarily romantic, you know, George—just like a story in a book."

The impertinence of these great folk! The tone of condescension and patronage in which her ladyship alluded to Alice Dynevor was by no means lost on me; but, I am afraid, ten thousand Alice Dynevors and their impertinent treatment at the hands of fine ladies weighed as rather less than nothing with me, just now, as against Hartover's apparent alienation. To reconquer his confidence and sympathy, to convince him of my unswerving loyalty, was the sole and only thing I cared about.

During the whole interview we had been kept standing, since Lady Longmoor remained standing herself. I fancied she had an eye to rapid with-

Digitized by Google

drawal whenever a promising strategic opportunity presented itself. As she spoke, she too moved towards the door. But Hartover, who, to my great comfort, had paused, listening both to her impertinently enthusiastic flourish and my disclaimer, faced about blocking her passage.

"One moment," he said. "Has Mr. Halidane, may I enquire, crowned his amiable mission as scandal-monger by communicating this piece of stolen information to my father?"

"No. He felt it was his duty to tell your father, but very properly consulted me first. And I dissuaded him."

"How charming of you!" from Hartover, not without sarcasm.

"I begged him to wait—not to speak of it yet. Later, I felt, circumstances might not improbably arise which would compel us to break it to your father. But naturally I wished to spare him as long as——"

"Pray, is that a threat?"

"Hardly a threat. But a warning—yes, possibly, dearest George. Take my advice and lay it to heart. And, since plain speaking seems the fashion to-night, you know your manner towards me is excessively strange—barely civil, in fact. Have you been drinking, by chance?"

The boy shook his head; but with an air! Insolence being to the fore, it was diamond cut diamond as between step-mother and step-son.

"Oh! dear, no. I have touched nothing stronger than water to-day," he said.

Digitized by Google

"Really! I am sorry to hear it, as that leaves no valid excuse for your behaviour. But I am tired; and, frankly, I can't admit any right on your part to keep me here listening first to nonsense, and then to incivility. Good-night, Mr. Brownlow. I do not know how long you propose to stay, so good-bye, too —in case, which is possible, I do not see you again. And now, George, be good enough to open the door for me."

From all which I derived the conviction that, for once, her ladyship had pretty thoroughly lost her temper. Then, as Hartover did not move:

"My dear George, do you hear? Even if you unfortunately have no love for your mother, you may still pay some respect, some ordinary courtesy towards your father's wife."

"For my father's wife I have all possible respect," he began.

My lady's dark eyebrows went up until they nearly met her fair hair.

"Indeed! You have a most original fashion of showing it!"

"But—for I, too, can issue a warning—I have very little of either for my cousin Jack Esdaile's mistress."

An instant of stupefaction.

Then: "How dare you! How dare you!" Lady Longmoor stormed.

She took a couple of steps forward, with the intention, I verily believe, of boxing Hartover's ears soundly. But he was too adroit for her. Catching her by both hands, he held them—not roughly, but

Digitized by Google

with a gallant, if naughty grace, vastly engaging. Some colour had come into his face. His eyes and lips laughed saucily.

"No, no, Your Magnificence," he said. "That belongs to the past, to the old nursery days, here and at Hover, when I was too small to hit back. I have grown up since then, and we are more evenly matched."

Ought I to interfere? To do so was to risk losing Hartover's trust and affection for ever. Therefore I thought, and still think, not.

Meanwhile, whether contact with physical force—to her a novel experience—tamed her, or whether conscience was the determining factor, I am uncertain; but—

"You young boor!" she exclaimed; and there ended all direct protest. For, at once, she began to try and make terms with him—an uneasiness, not to say an edge of fear, perceptible behind the fine chill of her manner. "Pray, what do you expect to gain by insulting me thus?"

"What I have never succeeded in gaining before—a clear stage and no favour."

"Be a little more explicit, please—that is, if you really have anything to be explicit about."

"Oh! dear, yes; plenty, plenty. I've no lack of material," Hartover answered. "But won't you come and sit down, since you are tired, so that we may talk it over comfortably?"

And, releasing one hand, the boy led her across the lovely room to a large white and gold settee—

Digitized by Google

prettily, as he might have led some charming partner after a dance—and, finally, sat down there beside her.

"Is it necessary that a third person be present," she asked, "at this extraordinary interview?"

"I prefer Brownlow to stay, if he will," Hartover answered. "It is desirable in your interests just as much as in my own."

"A packed jury! However, I am at your mercy—two men to one woman. If you command I cannot do otherwise than obey."

And she folded her hands in her lap, settling her beautiful shoulders back against the soft white and gold cushions.

"Now for this very chivalrous bargaining," she said scornfully. "For a bargain is just what it comes to, neither more nor less, I imagine."

"Yes," Hartover answered; and while as he spoke sauciness, laughter, almost youth itself, died out of his face, leaving it grave, drawn, and very pallid. "You are right. Between you and me, as matters now stand, Your Magnificence, it all comes to the dirty, low-caste business of a bargain—and a hard one. Only let us both speak the truth, please, in as far as we are able. It may save some ugly fighting hereafter.—You say you heard of the legalising of a certain entanglement from Mr. Halidane. Was that your first knowledge of it?"

"Rumours may have reached me earlier."

"Through whom?"—Hartover went white about the lips—"Through Fédore?"

Digitized by Google

"You forget, she had left my service."

"But had no rumours reached you through her—Fédore—of another marriage, about three years ago?"

Lady Longmoor moved slightly, throwing back her head. She was very angry, but she was also very nervous—so, at least, I fancied.

"This persistent asking of riddles becomes monotonous," she said. "Of what exactly are you speaking, my dear George?"

"Of Fédore's marriage to your butler, Marsigli. They were confidential servants, to both of whom we all understood you were a good deal attached. It seems improbable, when they married, you should be ignorant of the fact."

"Oh! there you are totally mistaken," she said, with a laugh. "The private lives of my servants are no concern of mine. So long as they serve me well, and there aren't any scandals in the household, I am not so fooolish as to invite annoyance by asking questions. If they are silent, I am silent likewise. I have no belief in fussing—especially when the establishment runs smooth. And then—tastes no doubt differ—but I really have more important and interesting things to think about than sentimental complications on the part of the maids."

"Even when one of the maids proposes to become your daughter-in-law?" the boy put in bitterly. "Come, Your Magnificence, what's the use of hedging. Did you or didn't you know?"

But here her ladyship saw fit to change her tactics

Digitized by Google

by making a spirited raid into the enemy's country.

"And if rumours, again, had reached me," she asked, "what then?"

"This—that, knowing, you still said nothing, made no attempt to prevent my doing this infamous thing."

"Stop, stop," Lady Longmoor cried. "You forget there is quite another aspect of the case. If I did not intervene it was simply because I knew intervention to be hopeless. Would you have listened to me? Have you ever listened? I am only human, after all, and my stock of patience, alas! is not inexhaustible. You can hardly deny having made heavy drafts on it, my dear George, for a number of years now."

"I deny nothing under that head," Hartover said quietly.

"Your escapades—to call them nothing worse—have caused us—my poor lord and me—endless vexation and trouble. I was weary of hearing about them from—oh! well, from a number of different sources. People are not slow in repeating what is offensive, and your name has become a positive bye-word in your regiment for every description of objectionable folly. Is it surprising if, at last, I gave up in despair? No doubt, it was wrong of me"—she glanced with very moving appeal in my direction—"but really, things came to a point last winter, when I was tempted to wash my hands of you altogether. You must go your own way. I was helpless to restrain you. All I asked was some little respite from

Digitized by Google

worry, from the perpetual wear and tear of concealing these wretched stories from your father."

"Thank you. I understand," Hartover said. "And so, other plans for wrecking me having miscarried—you and Jack Esdaile devised a good many—you connived at this abomination, just as you connived at—at—her running after me at Hover long ago, before Brownlow came. You encouraged her going to see me when I was ill—she told me so herself, told me that and a lot more too. And——"

He paused, leaning forward, looking on the ground, while his speech grew thick and unsteady.

"And the fact—however vile the deception she practised on me—that she was kind, nursed me, helped me fight against my bad habits, pulled me through, does not lessen your guilt by one iota either towards her or towards me. Her death lies at your door. Marsigli, poor brute, may have struck the actual blow, but you are responsible for it."

"Death? Fédore dead?—Marsigli?—What do you mean, George? What, in Heaven's name, are you talking about?"

In her extreme excitement and agitation Lady Longmoor seized the boy by the arm; but he shook himself free, getting up and backing away from her with a movement of uncontrollable revolt.

"Oh! yes," he said; "I know you've wanted—you've wanted for years to finish with me, to wipe me out. You've failed; but—but still, at the cost of a life. Explain to her, Brownlow, please. Tell her. It's beyond me. I can't."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XL

AND so for the second time, on this strange Sunday evening, I was called on to recount what I had heard and seen in the sad, blood-stained little house at Chelsea. And having done so, I withdrew, Hartover making no effort to detain me. For I felt, and I think he felt also, whatever remained to be said must be said behind closed doors, since it would be both unworthy and impolitic to subject this proud woman and great lady to further mortification. I left the two alone, the more willingly as the boy had proved himself, kept his head, kept his temper, shown himself at once astute and fearless. I could trust him to strike a bargain—for, as he said, between himself and her ladyship a bargain, and a hard one, it henceforth must be—discreditable neither to honour nor to justice. I could trust him not to be vindictive. He had not been so towards Fédore. He would not be so towards his stepmother.

I went downstairs and into the dining-room again, where I found William still making a pretence of clearing the table, though it was close on midnight.

"His lordship ate no dinner to call a dinner, sir," he said tentatively; "and after travelling all day too!"

But I refused to be drawn. William's curiosity

Digitized by Google

would, in all probability, be satisfied by the contents of the morning papers; and meanwhile I, unused to such strenuous demands upon my imagination and nervous energy, stood sorely in need of some rest.

Finding me a hopeless subject, the faithful fellow, to my relief, departed, permitting me to meditate undisturbed.—What of the future, Hartover's future? He had borne himself well and manfully throughout the evening; but would the events, now so deeply affecting him, make more than a passing impression? Would, he, a few months hence, return to his former unprofitable ways? Would the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life prove too strong after all, and work the undoing of this modern Alcibiades? And what of my own future? Should I go back to the untroubled scholarly life of Cambridge to live and die a college don? Or, supposing he and I continued, in some sort, our renewed intimacy of these last few days, had I the strength and wisdom to guide him? Were we quite at one, moreover, Hartover and I, or had Halidane succeeded in sowing discord, a suspicion which would remain and rankle in the dear boy's mind?

My thoughts were far from cheerful as I sat there alone, the great house quiet within, and London hushed to midnight stillness without. Would good come out of all this evil upon which, shrinking and aghast, I had so lately looked? Deeper question yet—is it possible that evil ever can breed good? And my thought wandered homelessly through labyrinths of speculation regarding dualism, that appar-

Digitized by Google

ently eternal inter-relation, inter-action of evil and of good, as manifested in nature, in history, in national and personal character, alike. Is there, verily, no good without alloy of evil, no evil lacking a strain of good? I thought of Fédore, as an example, at once befriending and devouring Hartover—whereby this mystery of dualism appeared painfully deepened and increased.

But then—unable, I suppose, to support the sorrow of its own homelessness any longer—my thought turned to the sheltered corner of the garden at Westrea—where the high red-brick wall forms an angle with the mellow red-brick house front—to which, in the sweet May mornings, the neat box-edged borders gay with spring flowers, the brimming water, the avenue of oaks and the pasture gently sloping upward to the sky-line, so pleasantly set out before us, Nellie Braithwaite would bring her sewing and I the book from which to read aloud.—Ah! surely this—this had been wholly without alloy, purely and perfectly good! I pictured the scene in all its details, felt again the emotions engendered by it, and received comfort to my soul—for—not for very long, alas!

The door opened. Hartover swung in. His face was still drawn and thin, but a spot of colour burned on either cheek and his eyes were extraordinarily bright.

"That's over," he said. "It has been damnable, utterly damnable. But it is done with. Now, please God, we start afresh—don't move, Brownlow."

Digitized by Google

This as I prepared to rise.

"I must talk," he went on—"talk to you now while the hot fit is still on me, so that you may register and, later, whip me up if I check or show any sign of running slack. Remind me of—of to-night. I have got what I bargained for—my clear stage and no favour. My step-mother signs a truce, under compulsion of—oh! yes, I know how ugly it sounds! compulsion of fear, the fear of exposure and social ruin. If she interferes between me and my father, he shall be told certain facts. If, after his death, I find she has played tricks with the property, I shall go to law, which will be equivalent to publishing those same facts to all the world. If she keeps faith with me, I will stand by her and do everything in my power to shield her name from scandal and disgrace. —For, Brownlow, those who sold her, as a little more than a child, to a man nearly twice her age, and a weak-brained, dyspeptic valetudinarian at that, did a very cruel thing.—All the same, the Rusher has to vanish. As long as my father lives he shall never darken these doors, or those of Hover, again. That is absolute."

While he spoke, Hartover roamed up and down the room restlessly, working off his excitement. Now he came and, sitting down on the arm of my chair, laid his hand gently on my shoulder.

"Dear old friend, forgive me," he said. "I ought to have known better. It was only for an instant I distrusted you; but I was so knocked about. The road to freedom—for it is freedom, through all this

Digitized by Google

shame and misery, this horror of crime and violence, I recognise that—has been very frightful to tread. Nothing can ever look quite the same again. I am new born, not only to man's estate, but to a new vision and understanding of what I may and will, God helping me—I don't shy at a little bit of piety for once!—do with my life. Only the pains of that new birth have been as the pains of hell, dear old man."

And here I think the tears came, for the boy's hand went up hastily to his eyes, and he turned away his face—from which I opined it would be some time before he and youth parted company, even yet!

"Gad!" he said, "I believe I should be thankful never to set eyes on a petticoat again, as long as I live; but," with a rather weary little laugh, "I suppose the misogynist attitude of mind won't last, whatever else does! Look here, Brownlow, how soon can you be ready to go up to Hover with me? I hear the grouse promise well this season, and I'll be hanged if Colonel Jack puts a ha'porth of shot into a solitary one of them. And, oh! dear me; I want to get away from London, away to the clean wind and the open moors and—forget."

I took no reading party to North Wales that summer, but rode Warcop's horses and tramped the fells with Hartover instead. And when I went back to Cambridge at the beginning of the October term, the boy—having sent in his papers on his twenty-first birthday—went back with me, thus carrying out his

Digitized by Google

old wish of passing at least one year at the University.

And Marsigli never came to trial, but died by his own hand in gaol, to Lady Longmoor's immense relief, as I imagine; but to Detective Inspector Lavender's immense disgust and discouragement of belief in his luck.

"The authorities may ignore it, sir," he said to me; "but I can't. That affair hammered more nails into the coffin of my professional reputation, or ought to have done so if every man had his deserts, than I care to count."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XLI

LITTLE further remains to be told. The story of my life, that is of its more interesting and critical portion, which I began to write in the long summer mornings when hay harvest kept more than half the parish busy in the fields, has occupied my leisure hours until now, when the first December snow showers fling a glittering mantle about royal Hover, rising there across the valley amid the domes and spires of the mighty pines.

And, as the record nears completion, the question comes, what shall be done with it? Shall I lock it away with other treasured sacred things—a few letters, one or two faded portraits (early examples of the photographer's doubtfully flattering art), a woman's glove, too, and a tag of once white ribbon foxed by age—a little hoard to be burned unlooked on when the peaceful churchyard, here close at hand, receives the baser part of me, and my soul goes back to God who gave it? Or, when that time comes, undreaded yet uncraved for—since life still is sweet—shall this record pass into the hands of her who has been its chief inspiration, the Laura, worthy of how far more melodious a Petrarch, the Beatrice, worthy of how far more eloquent a Dante, than my obscure and humble self? Is it mere weakness, outcome of an old man's doting and futile vanity, clutching at

Digitized by Google

the shadow where the substance is, and always had been, beyond his grasp, which makes me thus desire—when revelation can no longer bring heartburnings or disquiet—those wise and glorious eyes should read the secret of my love and of my sacrifice at last?

Sentimental? And, after all, why not? For who am I to condemn sentiment, which, if it contain no corrupt and morbid elements, is surely the strongest driving power towards noble deeds and heroical ventures human history can show? To decry or fear sentiment is to decry or fear the finest achievements of art, of literature, of romance, I had almost said of religion itself—all that, in short, upon which spirit, as distinct from matter, feeds and thrives.

And this, quite naturally if not quite obviously, brings me back to the year Hartover was up at Cambridge. During the few days I spent there myself, while making my peace with the members of the deserted reading party and, to some extent, with the good Master himself, I contrived to find time for an afternoon at Westrea. Nellie Braithwaite must hear something of all which had lately happened; yet to inform her by letter appeared to me inadvisable. I did not approve of carrying on any sort of correspondence behind her father's back. I must not raise hopes which might never be realised; but I might, without indiscretion, let her know Hartover was not only free, but fired, through that same freedom, with liberal ideas and worthy purposes—let her know, further, I had been faithful to my promise, and had thrown in my lot with the dear boy's for good and

Digitized by Google

all, so that nothing short of rejection on his part would make me leave him again.

But I speedily perceived, with mingled shame and admiration, any fear of raising undue hopes was quite uncalled for. I had underrated alike the courage and sensibility of Nellie Braithwaite's nature. For her gladness at my news was veiled by a sweet reserve both of expression and enquiry—assurance of Hartover's well-being bringing all her maidenly dignity into play. Henceforth, as I saw, she would wrap her love about with silence, hiding it even from me, her chosen friend, in delicate yet lofty pride. No finger would she raise to beckon Hartover or recall that early love passage; while, as I also saw, my presence in future would be less acceptable to her because, from my closeness to Hartover, I formed, in a measure, a link between him and herself.

I left Westrea, on my return journey to Cambridge, somewhat crestfallen. As reward of my zeal in fulfilling—and successfully, moreover—the promise I gave her, was I to be exiled from her confidence? That seemed arbitrary and, indeed, a little unjust. Whereupon I made a reflection—made how many thousand times already by how many thousands of my sex!—that the ways of woman, be she pure and noble or, alas! signally the reverse, are one and all mysterious, past forecasting and past finding out.

And at that I had to leave it. For Hartover, on his part, spoke no word, gave no sign. Hover, the moors, the stables, the kennels, and, as I observed with satisfaction, so much of the varied business of

Digitized by Google

the great property as he could get in touch with, filled his time and mind to the exclusion of all question of—in his own phrase—"petticoats." Was Nellie Braithwaite forgotten then? Once again I must be stern with myself; for how should it advantage me even if she was?

But specially did stables and kennels bulk big among the dear boy's many interests and occupations during that pleasant long vacation, whereby Warcop was made the happiest of men. For one morning, about a fortnight after our arrival, Hartover threw a letter to me across the breakfast table.

"Read that," he said. "The Rusher signs his abdication—gives up the hounds, moves his horses—or what he is pleased to call his—I think I know who has paid for them and their keep for a good dozen years now—and hunts in Leicestershire this winter. My father must not, of course, be worried, so Her Magnificence forwards the letter to me. Really, it strikes me as rather pathetic, Brownlow. How are the mighty fallen! But, pathetic or not, the hounds must be hunted this season, or the mouth of our enemy—Bramhall, to wit—will be altogether too extensively enlarged over us.—Oh! well, if it comes to that, I suppose I can hunt them well enough myself, with Warcop's help, putting in a day every fortnight or so from Cambridge during term time. I'll back myself to be a popular master before the end of the winter, though there will be prejudices to live down, no doubt. Gad! so much the better—*carrière ouverte aux talents*. After all, I can canoodle and

Digitized by Google

coax against most people, you know, and be nine foot high, too, when I like."

Which was perfectly true. Had I not experience thereof? I fell in with this idea the more readily since our English institution of fox-hunting plays so large a part in country life, bringing landlord and tenant together on equal terms and establishing a friendly and wholesome relation invaluable as between class and class. Mastership of the Hover, though infringing somewhat upon the routine of his college work, was in my opinion calculated to prove an excellent introduction to those larger and immensely more important forms of mastership which, for Hartover, seemed to loom up by no means far ahead.

But creaking gates hang long, the proverb says. And this proved true of the invalid at Bath. The months passed, and yet Lord Longmoor, though increasingly fanciful, increasingly querulous, increasingly a sick man, in truth, still kept a feeble hold of life through autumn, winter, spring, and on into the golden heats of midsummer. The May term again drew to its close, and with it Hartover's sojourn at Cambridge. How had the university affected and influenced him? Chiefly, I believed, as a pause, a place of recovery before further effort. Out of the great world he had come, surfeited by all too heavy a meal—for one of his age—of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Back into the great world, it was ordained, he must return. But he had rested by the way, had slept off the effects,

Digitized by Google

so to speak, of that over-much and evil fruit-eating, had at once steadied and grown younger.

Meanwhile he was the darling of the college; where, from the good Master, through ranks of dons and gownsmen, down to gyps and bed-makers, he was an object of interest and of admiration. And this less from snobbery, the vulgar spirit—too common among us—which "loves a lord," than from his own charm and grace and the irresistible way he had with him. The affection he inspired and interest he excited, touched and amused him, when he happened to be conscious of it; but his eyes, so I fancied, were set on something beyond, and as the time of departure drew near I seemed to observe in him a growing preoccupation and restlessness.

And so the anniversary of his hurried journey to find me came round—the anniversary, too, of Fédore's death. Did he remember it, I wondered—remember his torment of suspense and desolation? He never spoke of Fédore, or of the crowded events of those few rather desperate days. The recuperative power of youth is wellnigh unlimited. Was remembrance of them erased from his mind by a natural and healthy process of attrition, or was his silence intentional? Again I wondered.

When he left Cambridge I should go with him, and not for the long vacation merely. But, by the Master's kind advice and permission, I was to retain both my fellowship and my rooms, putting in so much residence in the course of the year as I could manage. Of this I was glad. Not for an instant did I

Digitized by Google

hesitate to follow Hartover; but it would, I own, have caused me a keen pang to sever my connection with the university entirely.

All day, on the anniversary of Fédore's death, I had been packing and sorting my now not inconsiderable library, destroying—odious occupation—old letters and papers. While so engaged the thought of Nellie Braithwaite had been curiously, almost oppressively, present to me. Only thrice had I seen her during the past eight or nine months. I should, in all probability, see her even less frequently in future. Yes, Hartover's emancipation, strangely enough, parted us far more effectually than Hartover's wrongdoings or Hartover's troubles ever had. Would she live on, without change of estate or of place, from girlhood to womanhood, womanhood to old age, busied with home and household, and the care of her father, still cherishing the exquisite yet unfruitful love of her youth? That was a lovely picture, but a sad one. As I destroyed papers, sorted and packed my books, I almost unconsciously placed another picture beside it. For years hence, when the shadows grew long, might it not be possible she would weary of such an existence? Then, in the twilight, might not my turn come, might not she and I grow old together, dwelling under the same roof, bearing the same name at last? A lovely picture too—if a little dim and pallid—lovely at least to me. I went on with my sorting and packing, a smile on my lips and grip of not unpleasant pain about my heart.

Went on, until it grew too dark for me to read the

Digitized by Google

names of the books as I took them down off the shelves. I lighted the candles on my study table, using a wax vesta from an old silver box the dear boy had once given me. And, so doing, I recollected with a start that, absorbed in my own preparations for departure, I had not seen him all day. The occurrence was so unusual that, realising it, I felt somewhat uneasy. I recollected, moreover, that he had not put in an appearance at hall. This increased my uneasiness. I sent round to his rooms, in the big quadrangle, only to learn that he had gone out riding early, taking no groom with him, and leaving no information as to the probable time of his return or as to his destination.

Nine o'clock, half-past nine, ten o'clock struck. Darling of the college or not, at this rate my young lord ran a chance of being ignominiously gated. Uneasiness deepened into anxiety, anxiety into downright alarm.

It was not possible to sit still in this state of suspense any longer. I went out on to the landing, down my staircase, and half-way across the small court—charming in the warm gloom of the midsummer night, with its tinkling fountain, its squares and oblongs of lamplit window—when footsteps rang out under the archway, and a young man came towards me, not in regulation cap and gown, but high riding boots, white cord breeches, his coat and hat appearing white also, so thickly overlaid were they by dust.

Hartover slipped his arm within mine.

"That's right," he said, with a queer, gay, yet

Digitized by Google

half-shy little laugh. "I could have sworn I should find you, every feather on end, clucking after your lost chick; so I came right on here, without stopping to change or have a brush."

"But where have you been, my dear boy?" I cried, still agitated, struck, moreover, by a strangeness in his manner. Not that his gaiety was forced. On the contrary, it seemed to bubble up and overflow out of some depth of incontrollable gladness.

"Doing the best day's work of my life," he answered. "But let me come up to your rooms. We can't talk here. And there are things to explain. Good as the day's work is, you still have to put the finishing touch to it. Can't do without you, you see, in good fortune any more than in bad—even if I wanted to, which, God knows, I don't. But forty miles, dear old man, in dust and sun—or nearer fifty, for, like a fool, I lost my way coming back and gandered about for ever so long in those fenlands. Gad! how enchanting they are though, Brownlow! —The vast reed beds, and great meres like shining mirrors, holding miles of sky in their pretty laps, and the long skeins of wild-fowl rising off them and calling to the sunset. I have never understood the fascination of a flat country before. I must go and have another look at it all some day—some day—because it will speak to me of——"

He broke off. And again he laughed, mounting the dark stairs so rapidly beside me that I had some ado to keep pace with him.

Once inside, he threw hat, gloves, and crop down

Digitized by Google

on the table, blew out the candles, and, crossing the room, lowered himself gingerly on to the window-seat.

"Let's sit in the dark.—Jeshurun! I am stiff, though!—You don't mind—the dark I mean—do you? It's more peaceful."

I minded nothing but delay, for a feverish impatience was upon me.

"Yes," he went on; "the finishing touch has to be yours, Brownlow. There's something I want you to do for me, as usual."

"What?" I asked.

"This: You remember that which happened a year ago to-day?"

His tone changed, sobered. I did remember, and told him so.

"I have waited through a whole year as a penance—a penance self-inflicted in expiation of certain sins. During that year I have lived cleanly."

And I felt, rather than saw, his eyes fixed on mine—felt, too, that his face flushed.

"I knew perfectly well that by waiting I risked losing what I supremely longed for. But I accepted that risk as part of my penance—the very heart of it, in fact."

"Yes," I murmured, greatly marvelling to what his speech should lead up.

He leaned across and laid his hand on my knee.

"I rode over to Westrea to-day," he said.

"Westrea? What do you know—how have you heard about Westrea?" I exclaimed.

Digitized by Google

"From Warcop, when last we were at Hover. I could not say anything to you, Brownlow, because I would not have you involved. The Braithwaites were your friends, and I didn't want, of course, to come between you and them, which could hardly have been avoided if—well, if things had turned out badly for me."

Again that note of incontrollable gladness in his voice.

"I felt it would be unfair to ask questions of you, as I could not explain; and the penance had to be completed in full before I could talk of it. But Warcop was different. I had no scruple in finding out from him where they—where she—now lived. And——"

He turned, leaning his elbow on the window-sill, speaking softly, and looking out into the fair windless night.

"I—I have seen her. I have been with her nearly all day. Braithwaite was away, luckily—at Thetford, I believe she told me—at some political meeting. She has not changed, except that she is even more beautiful than I remembered. And she loves me. She will marry me, when her father gives his consent."

A minute or more of silence, for I could not bring myself to speak. But, absorbed as Hartover was in his own joy, he failed to notice it, I think. Presently he faced round, and once more I felt his eyes fixed on mine.

"And this is where your good offices come in, dear

Digitized by Google

old man," he went on. "Of course I shall go to Braithwaite myself, and ask for her hand with all due form and ceremony. But I want you to see or write to him too, and back me up. Tell him I'm not the young rake and wastrel he probably imagines me to be—and which—well—I once was. Tell him he needn't be afraid to trust her to me; for I know the world pretty thoroughly by now, and still find her the noblest and most precious thing in it. Tell him," —and he laughed a little naughtily—"he may just as well give in first as last, for have her I will, if I'm obliged to kidnap her, carry her off without with your leave or by your leave. Nothing will stop me short of death; so he'd best accept the inevitable. I am perfectly aware I belong to a class he'd like to exterminate—that he regards me as an absurd anachronism, a poisonous blotch on the body politic. But, as I was explaining to her to-day, I can't help being who I am. This, anyhow, is not my fault.—Ah! and that's so delicious about her, Brownlow!—Just what has made other women keen to catch me, actually stands in my way with her. She doesn't care a row of pins, I verily believe, for money, or rank, or titles. It is I, myself, she loves, not what I can give her. Quaint, you know, after two or three seasons of London mothers with daughters on hand for sale —it strikes one as quaint, but, good Lord, how mighty refreshing!"

Again he leaned his elbow on the window-sill, turning his head. I could just make out the line of

Digitized by Google

his profile, the lips parted in something between a sigh and laughter.

"She's so clever, too—so splendidly awake. Picture the endless delight of showing her beautiful things, new and beautiful places! And she is so well read—far better read than I. That's very much, thanks to you, Brownlow. She spoke of you so sweetly, and of the comfort and help your friendship had been to her. I'm very grateful; though, upon my word, I came deucedly near being jealous once or twice, and inclined to think she praised you a wee bit too highly. But, joking apart, dear old man, you will see Braithwaite and give me a good character?"

He rose as he spoke. It was time. I could not have endured much longer. For I had been racked if ever man had—each sentence of Hartover's merry, —serious, teasing, eloquent, tender—an added turn of the screw under which muscles parted and sinews snapped. How thankful I was to the merciful darkness which hid me! My voice I could, to some extent, command, but by my looks I must have been betrayed.

Hartover felt the way across to the table, picked up his hat, gloves, and crop. Mechanically I rose too, and followed him out on to the landing.

"The sooner the better," he said slyly. "Think how long I've waited! I ascertained Braithwaite will be at home all day. Couldn't you go to-morrow?"

"If I can get a conveyance," I answered.

"There are my horses."

Digitized by Google

But twenty miles' ride out, and twenty back, with such an interview in the interval, was, I felt, beyond my strength.

"Oh! well; leave it to me, then. I'll arrange," the boy said, "if you'll let me. Good-night, Brownlow, and God bless you! You're the dearest and best friend living."

He ran down the dark stairs, and swung across the little court. I listened, till the sound of his footsteps died out under the archway, and went back, shutting and locking both doors behind me. Then came the blackest hour of my life—worse than the racking—wherein I fought, in solitude, with the seven devils of envy, hatred, and malice, the devil of loneliness too; with the natural animal man in me, and with visions—almost concrete in their vividness and intensity—of what Nellie's love must and would surely be to him on whom she bestowed it.

Of the following day I retain a strange memory, as of something unreal and phantasmal. I believe I looked much as usual, talked as usual, behaved in a reasonable and normal manner. But my speech and action were alike mechanical. My brain worked, my material and physical brain, that is; but for the time being soul and heart were dead in me. I felt no emotion, felt nothing, indeed, save a dumb ache of longing the day were over and I free to rest.

For I drove out to Westrea, of course. How could I do otherwise? True to his word, Hartover had made all necessary arrangements, as he sent word to me early. At the same time he sent round

Digitized by Google

a note, with the request I would deliver it to Nellie—of which more hereafter. I found Braithwaite at home and greatly perturbed in mind; for, like the fearless and honourable being she was, Nellie had already told him both the fact and purpose of Hartover's visit.

"I know what brings you here, Brownlow," he said, as he met me in the porch. "And I could wish you a worthier errand. I confess I am very sore. I flattered myself this mad project had received its quietus long ago. I object to it as strongly as I ever objected, and for the same reasons. Such a marriage is equally contrary to my wishes and my convictions. Permitting it, I, having preached to others, should indeed become myself a castaway. What will those, who share my views as to the iniquity of the aristocratic, the feudal system—which strangles the independence and stunts the moral and material growth of three-fifths of, so-called, free Englishmen—think of me, when they find me throwing principle to the winds for the vulgar satisfaction of seeing my daughter a countess?"

This, and much more to the same effect, weighted by sufficient substratum of truth to render it difficult to combat. Not only natural and genuine fear for Nellie's future happiness, but all his native obstinacy was aroused. In vain, as it seemed, I pleaded the change in Hartover, the seriousness of his purpose, the depths of his affection, his growing sense of responsibility. In vain, too, I made a clean breast of certain family matters, spoke of Fédore's unscrupu-

Digitized by Google

lous pursuit, her ladyship's complicity, and of the intrigues which had surrounded Hartover, as I feared, from childhood.

"Granted all you say," he answered. "Granted the young man's reformation is sincere and promises to be lasting, can you honestly advise me, my dear Brownlow, to let my daughter become part and parcel of a society thus permeated by low scheming and, on your own showing, by downright immorality? You are actuated by a fantastic and chivalrous devotion to this handsome young princeling, which blinds you to facts. Sensible fellow though you are, he has dazzled and bewitched you, just as he dazzles and bewitches my poor Nellie. But having an honest and deep-seated objection to anything in the shape of princelings, I retain my clearness of eyesight, and am actuated by common sense and prudence regarding the safety of my daughter."

"At the cost of breaking her heart?" I rather wearily ventured.

Whereupon we started to argue the whole question over again. While thus engaged we had sauntered to the door of the pleasant low-ceilinged living-room opening on to the garden, which, brilliant in colour, rich with the scent of sweet-briar and syringa, of borders thick-set with pinks, sweet-williams and roses, basked between its high red walls in the still afternoon sunshine. On the threshold Braithwaite turned to me, saying almost bitterly:

"Ah! Brownlow, I am disappointed. Why couldn't you speak for yourself, man? How will-

Digitized by Google

ingly would I have given her to you, had you asked me! Often have I hoped, since you stayed under my roof at Easter year, it might eventually come to that."

Well for me I had been racked and devil-hunted last night till emotion was dead in me!

"Why have I never spoken for myself? Because —well—look at Nellie. There is your answer."

And I pointed to the upward sloping pasture. Now I divined the contents of that note which the boy had confided to me for delivery. I was not only his ambassador, but his despatch rider. My mission hardly unfolded, he followed daringly close behind.

For down across the turf walked Hartover leading his horse, hat in hand. Beside him, in blue-sprigged muslin gown and lilac sun-bonnet, walked Nellie. As we stepped out of the doorway she caught sight of us, and the sound of her voice came in soft but rapid speech. The young man, whose head inclined towards her, looked up and gallantly waved his hat. They reached the bottom of the slope, and as they stood side by side on the bank, the great brown hunter, extending its neck, sniffed the coolth off the water. Only the brimming stream and bright garden lay between them and us.

"Mr. Braithwaite," Hartover called, "shall I be forced to run away with her? Time and place favour it; and, Gad! sir, my horse has plenty left in him yet."

He slipped his arm round the girl's waist and made a feint of tossing her on to the saddle.

Digitized by Google

"'Confound the fellow's impudence!" Braithwaite growled, as he moved back into the house.

But his eyes were wet. He was beaten. Youth and love had won the day, and he knew it.

Thus came the end, or rather the beginning. For the end—as I looked across the valley this morning at royal Hover, wrapped in that glittering mantle of new-fallen snow—is not, please God, for a long time yet.

Still, in point of fact, Nellie Braithwaite never became Lady Hartover. For Braithwaite exacted an interval of six months before the wedding; and before those same six months were out the poor creaking gate, away at Bath, had creaked itself finally out of earthly existence, and into—let us charitably hope—a more profitable heavenly one; while—such after all is the smooth working of our aristocratic and hereditary system, with its *le roi est mort, vive le roi*—over his great possessions his son, my always very dear, and sometime very naughty, pupil, reigned in his stead.

As to myself, Cambridge and Hover, Hover and Cambridge, till, the home living falling vacant, I removed myself and my books here to this pleasant parsonage, where learned and unlearned, gentle and simple, young and old, are good enough to come and visit me, and confide to me their hopes, and joys, disappointments, sorrows, and sometimes—poor souls—their sins.

THE END

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

RETURN TO ➡ **MAIN CIRCULATION**

ALL BOOKS ARE SUBJECT TO RECALL
RENEW BOOKS BY CALLING **642-3405**

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

REC. MOFFITT OCT 19'94

RECEIVED

OCT 20 1994

CIRCULATION DEPT.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
BERKELEY, CA 94720

FORM NO. DD6

LD 21–100*m*-8,'34

Digitized by Google

134231171G

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES

C046767670

355503

Kingsley

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Digitized by Google